Dies Tristes

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SERMONS

FOR

Seasons of Sorrow

BY

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PREFACE.

It is strange to think that *sorrow*, which is one of the most common experiences of life, and the inevitable consequence of mental or bodily pain, should have been regarded at various periods of the Church's history as *a vice*, and classified as such in documents belonging to these periods, copies of which have come down to the present day. And it is still more strange to think that such a conception of human distress should have been held and inculcated, by men who cannot be regarded as the more ignorant of the clergy, at certain periods of the

middle ages, but by those who occupied prominent positions in the Christian Church, and whose names are even now familiar to all ecclesiastical scholars. Elfric, a celebrated Anglo-Saxon divine of the eleventh century, and who is supposed to have been Archbishop of York from the year 1023 to 1051, has left in one of the many writings with which he has enriched Anglo-Saxon literature the clearest evidence that he is chargeable with this fault. And in his case it is all the more to be regretted, because in his well-known Paschal Homily, which was reproduced by Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, somewhere about the year 1566, it is clearly shown that the Church of England did not hold the doctrine of Transubstantiation before the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century, in regard to the elements used in the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. No doubt Elfric

was guilty, like many divines in these comparatively dark ages, of mutilating the Decalogue by the excision of the *second* Commandment, and the splitting of the *tenth;* but how he should go so very far astray in his conception of *sorrow*—an experience of human life so common and distressing, and a feature in the earthly character of the Redeemer of the world so very marked and striking—can only be explained by supposing comparative ignorance of the Word of God and its teaching in regard to this matter. For throughout the whole of the sacred writings *sorrow* is not only referred to, but most tenderly dealt with by all the inspired penmen.

Before Elfric was raised to the high position of Archbishop of York, and while probably only a monk of the Abbey of Cerne, or Cernel as it was then called, in Dorsetshire, he had apparently been commissioned

by Wulfstan, a previous Archbishop of York, somewhere about the year 1002, to draw up a kind of *charge* for the instruction and guidance of the clergy of that see, and probably for others also; and it is in this document, written originally in the Saxon character, and entitled 'Elfric's Second Epistle,' that we find sorrow or *tristitia* classified among the vices of mankind.

After enumerating the Ten Commandments, or, as he calls them, "the ten chief commandments," he goes on to say, addressing the clergy: "We will therefore tell you in the same short way about the eight capital vices which undo unwary people, and indeed sink them *in everlasting punishments*. The first capital vice is in Latin *Superbia*, and in English Pride. . . . The second capital vice is *Gastrimargia vel Gula*, that is, in English, Greediness. . . . The third capital vice is *Fornicatio*, that is, Las-

civiousness. . . . The fourth capital vice is *Avaritia* in Latin, and in English Covetousness. . . . The fifth is *Ira*, that is, Waywardness. . . . The sixth is *Accidia*, that is, Listlessness, or a depression of spirits and immoderate sluggishness which make man never ready for any good. . . . The seventh capital vice is *Tristitia* in Latin, that is, in English, Sadness for various accidents that come to men in sickness and in losses, or in the death of friends, when a man grieves in his mind to excess, and unwisely murmurs against God. There are two sadnesses, as books tell us,—one is the *bad* kind that we are speaking about, the other is the salutary, which we have now to mention, making a man sorry for his former sins, and bent upon repenting of them. The *bad* sadness is overcome by that happy frame of mind which goodness is certain to bestow on man. The eighth capital vice is

Cenodoxia, id est Jactantia vel Vana Gloria, that is, Vanity in English, or Pomposity, which makes a man vainglorious and filled with conceit, though there may be nothing in him to praise."

Now although it may be unwise and improper to murmur against God under affliction or in times of bereavement, surely it is both inhuman and unchristian to characterise sorrow or sadness, under such dispensations of Providence, as a *vice*, and to speak of it as that which undoes "unwary people, and indeed sinks them in everlasting punishments." For when we think of the sorrow of Abraham for his beloved Sarah, of that of the Israelites for Jacob, of that of David for Absalom, and of that of Jesus for Lazarus, and when we consider the tenderness with which the afflicted are everywhere dealt with in the Word of God, we cannot but feel astonished at the ignorance of Christian

teachers in the eleventh century, and lament the sad fate of those who had to submit to such teaching in their dark hours of sorrow and bereavement. It is a complaint made by God through an ancient prophet (Isaiah lvii. 1) that "the righteous perisheth, and no man *layeth it to heart.*"

But Elfric was not the only Christian teacher in these ages who showed such ignorance of the spirit and character of our holy religion, nor was the eleventh century the only one in which such erroneous notions prevailed. The thirteenth century also is chargeable with a like misconception in regard to the meaning and character of *sorrow.* And, strange to say, one of the most prominent names in that century is associated with this erroneous and unscriptural view. Thomas Aquinas—the Angelical Doctor, as he was called, a famous theologian, and one of the most celebrated expounders of the schol-

astic philosophy at that period—like Elfric, deals with the vices of mankind; but instead of making them *eight*, he restricts them to *seven*, and yet among these seven vices *tristitia* or sorrow appears. Aquinas's capital vices are these—viz., *Inanis Gloria*, *Invidia*, *Ira*, *Avaritia*, *Tristitia*, *Gula*, *Luxuria*.[1] Here, then, we have a Christian teacher in the thirteenth century also characterising sorrow as *a vice*, speaking of it as it is nowhere spoken of in the Word of God. And when we think of the celebrity of the Saxon Elfric and the Italian Aquinas, and consider the long interval that separated the one from the other, we are naturally forced to the conclusion, that for ages and generations the great majority of suffering Christians throughout Europe were deprived of the rich consolations of our holy religion in

[1] Prima Secundæ, Col. Aqr. 1622, p. 147. *Vide* Angl.-Sax. Ch., pp. 276-278, Soames' Hist.

the darkest hours of their sorrow and distress; and we should bless God that we live in more sympathetic, enlightened, and Christian times.

The first two sermons in this volume have already appeared in print, the others have not. But they are all intended, under the divine blessing, to impart comfort to the bereaved and sorrowing, and so to form a portion of that extensive field of Christian literature which may be characterised as the *Literature of Consolation*, at the head of which undoubtedly stand the many consolatory passages in the Word of God. And as sorrow is a strange experience in the lives of all men, so the literature that ministers to it must necessarily be different in tone and thought, and even at times in expression,

from the common and secular literature of the world. The Saviour speaks of a *blessedness* in connection with mourning (Matt. v. 4), and that *blessedness*, as He Himself tells us, is associated with comfort or consolation.

COLINTON MANSE,
December 20, 1892.

SERMON I.

Sorrowing for the Departed.[1]

LUKE VIII. 52.

"And all wept, and bewailed her."

THIS is the divinely-attested announcement of the grief of a family in Capernaum, in the days of our Lord, at the death of an only and apparently much-loved daughter. The inspired record, like a thing immortal in a changing world, has borne down the mournful tale of this family's sorrow to each succeeding generation of Christians, to inform mourners of the merciless

[1] This sermon, as originally delivered, was a memorial sermon for an only niece—the only child of a brother of the author. She passed away in the fourteenth year of her age.

ravages of death in former times—even in the days of Christ—and to assure them that their grief is no new or unexampled thing in the world. Indeed, side by side throughout all history, with the advance of time, the growth and progress of society, the varied and shifting transactions of man's everyday life, there is this perpetual wail of sorrow for the dead filling all ears,—damping the flow of human life and enjoyment, and extracting from man's spiritual nature the most searching inquiries into the eternal and unseen. Nor is this to be at all wondered at; for day after day, and hour after hour, in rapid succession, have the busy workers and thinkers in this mundane scene been falling down in the conflict of life; some in early morning, all fresh and fragrant as the flower, others in the full glory of their noonday manhood, and others, again, in the far-on evening of life,

"Like weary suns that sink into the sea."

In sick-rooms and hospitals, on oceans and

battle-fields, in solitude and in the crowded thoroughfares of life,—wherever, indeed, men have been found living, there also have they been found dying. The young, the beautiful, the feeble, the strong, the learned, the ignorant,—all of bygone times have had to pass away when God's good time has come. And although this sinking into the grave is inappreciable in the general mass,—although God does not clear the earth of its inhabitants all at once, as the forest in autumn is swept of its leaves, or the fields of their waving crops, —yet the destruction is nevertheless just as sure, the blow as terrible; and here and there, all over this wide world, in this warm and happy home and that one, does one after another pass away, and "sorrow and sighing" arise from the hearts of the bereaved.

Now this bitter phase of life was experienced in the house of Jairus in the days of our Lord. This ruler of the synagogue—like many men before and since—had an only daughter, one, too, that was just emerging from the years of childhood; and death,

covetous of the prize, jealous of the happiness and joy that she was producing in her father's house; or, better and truer still, death's Lord, discerning in her some "good thing," as He did in the youthful son of Jeroboam, and having a higher and nobler destiny for her, as a reward of her piety in another world, took her away,—removed the jewel from the casket, and left nothing but emptiness and misery behind. Jairus, who was brought near to God by his office, was thus brought nearer still by an event of Providence that swept away the gentlest and purest spirit from his home. And, strange to say, instead of going to the rites of his religion in the day of his distress, he flies to Jesus, then a mysterious stranger in the land, while the inmates of his home mourn and weep. Because the loved one was no more—because the gentle child with womanhood's dawn on her had been laid low —because the tender and graceful form that had sported there in that home all through the pleasing days of childhood, and on whom

the storms of winter had never been allowed too heavily to press,—because this creature of affection, beauty, and hope was now withered and blasted by the cold hand of death, the lonely and beggared inmates of that home mourn and weep. Nor does the compassionate Saviour forbid these tears, although He apparently does so when He says, "Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth," as if He were ignorant of, or insensible to, the great calamity that had taken place there. On the contrary, He only indicates all the more tenderly His interest in them, and His sympathy for them, by these soothing words, and the pleasing epithet which He applies to death; whilst the secret resolution is already formed in His mind to undo what death has done,—to deprive the tyrant of his victim—to rob the spoiler of his prey—to restore the lamb to its desolate fold—the rose to its original beauty and fragrance, and replace it on the parent stem,—in short, to infuse life again into that withered and wasting form, and

thus to show that while He is "the Man of Sorrows," He is also the Lord of life, and that He removes grief from the hearts of His people, not by underestimating its bitterness —not by senseless calls to apathy or stoical indifference—not by forced acquiescence, nor yet by arbitrary and authoritative commands —but by the removal, in this instance, of the baneful evil which was the cause of it all, and by assuring others of His followers in all ages, that the spirits of their dear dead friends are with Him in glory, whilst their bodies shall yet be raised from the grave to share in the honours of an immortal life.

The daughter of Jairus was there and then raised from the sleep of death by Jesus, and restored to her parents, whose joy, we may well imagine, would know no bounds. The *only daughter*, like the *only son*, and *only brother* of the same Gospel story, was brought back from the eternal world to gladden for a little an earthly home once more. But such an achievement as this has only happened in a few instances in the history of our world;

and consequently the bereaved, as far as an immediate return to life is concerned, are left to weep for their dead. And perhaps it is the case, that among all the trials that fall to the lot of man, there is none more bitter than bereavement, and no sorrow like that of weeping for an only child. Indeed, it may safely be asserted that grief for the dead is the bitterest and sorest cup which loving and sensitive natures have to drink. Sorrow for sin—grief for the loss of wealth or character, or any of this world's prizes—lamentations over the shipwreck of earthly hopes and ambition's enterprises—murmurings at personal losses and calamities, such as deafness, blindness, the maiming of the body—the decay of some faculty of the mind,—what is any or all of these compared to the grief that is felt when some dear bosom friend, that walked by your side and cheered your very existence, is in the morning of a hopeful life cut down by death and laid in the grave? Notwithstanding all the hopes and promises of the Gospel—the ability of the Saviour to save—

the grand and glorious destiny of the redeemed—the bright robes and joyous countenances and waving palms of the shining city,—notwithstanding these, and the many thoughts and associations that are connected with them, yet the removal by death of those we love away from us—the consigning of the body to the tomb or the grave—the absence for ever afterwards of the beloved one from our home and our fireside, and our walks and excursions, in all that future that is before us, changes the very aspect of life, and, for a time at least, makes summer scenes and days dismal as the darkest of winter's hours. Indeed, in these fresh moments of grief the world seems a wilderness. All its fairest flowers and richest colours are clothed as with sackcloth. Society has no charm. The faces and friends we delighted to see are delighted in no more. Even God — blessed be His name!—is often thought unkind; and when day by day we go through the silent house and behold the empty chair, the well-known

clothes, the deserted bed, so full of the memories of life's closing hours, and all the places and objects that are so full of, and so much associated with, the departed, then do we realise vividly the depth and bitterness of our bereavement; and the desolate soul feels, in these freshest moments of sorrow, that any happiness it can extract from life now is not to be found in the objects that once engaged it, but in fondly cherished thoughts of the departed—in seraphic visions of the heavenly home—in the blessedness of being with Jesus, and in bright anticipations of meeting again in happier and better scenes, where separation and sorrow shall be unknown.

I. And that such sorrow for the departed is *neither unnatural nor unreasonable, but in perfect harmony with man's emotional nature, as well as with the teachings of revelation, will appear if you consider what has actually taken place.*

When death enters your home, disguise it

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as you may, it is, as far as sense and observation are concerned, the destruction of a valued human being. Now the destruction of any work of God, especially any of His higher works, is a saddening spectacle to every reflective mind. The spirit that is within us rejoices at God's creative acts, but shrinks with horror from His destroying judgments. Just as life, happy and joyous, is far more pleasing and satisfactory to the mind than disease and death, so the creation and preservation of objects and creatures are far more in harmony with human sensibilities than their destruction. Even the changes of nature provoke a contrast in our minds. For with what different feelings do we look upon the budding and blossoming of flowers and fruits, and the full development of nature's operations in spring and summer, compared to what we do when decay sets in, and when destruction and death walk over so much of the world in autumn and winter! Indeed, this reign of death is one of the strongest evidences of

the imperfection and unsatisfactoriness of this present scene; whilst the mind's horror at it, and condemnation of it, is one of the strongest proofs of its own immortality, and of the disorder that now exists among the works of God—works that were at one time pronounced to be very good. Death in itself is repulsive to every mind, and as we behold and feel its merciless ravages, the spirit within us is often roused to a kind of involuntary and momentary rebellion against the existence and permission of such a terrible law in the world. To see the hurricane, for instance, sweeping away the happy homes of multitudes, or burying them in ruins—or the earth opening its mouth and swallowing up, in an instant, living men, and women, and children, without any warning given or preparation made; to behold the industrious habits of men rewarded often by sudden ruin, and ships and their living and precious cargoes buried in the sea; to think of this poison and that one being allowed to exist and fructify in the very air

we breathe, and nature often in her ordinary processes rising up as if in vengeance, like some demon, to destroy the poor frail creatures that are more or less subject to her control, and often all unconsciously transgress her laws, — to think of these, and suchlike occurrences as these, which indeed often shake the faith and wound the hearts of thousands, what mind is not appalled? Indeed, so far are such things from meeting with sympathy from man, that, on the contrary, they are shuddered at and loathed, and only acquiesced in by the mind, because of the distinct teachings of revelation, the existence of evil in the world, the penal character of the divine government, and the fond anticipation of clearer light and better scenes hereafter—when all the perplexing mysteries and apparent anomalies of the divine government shall not only cease, but be explained, and when it will be found that, in all these present sufferings of His children upon earth, the loving Father has been working to a great, and glorious, and beneficent result.

If this be the case then, and such the judgment of the mind at the outer and more distant calamities of life, what a crushing blow must the heart receive when the object of destruction is your own dear friend—your own flesh and blood, perhaps—the very creature that God has given you to make you happy, the inmate of your home, the companion of your daily life, or, as in the case of this ruler, *an only daughter!* What tongue shall then venture to describe the anguish of your soul? What mind shall attempt to realise the depth and bitterness of your grief? Ah, brethren! death strikes but gently at your heart when it is the idol of another's that it has carried away. It is but the skirts of the Great Destroyer going through the land that you have *seen;* you have felt nothing at all of his tremendous power if his victims lie cold and stiff in *other homes,* and all that was living, and loving, and thoughtful, and kind, has vanished from the mourner's sight. And when you think that man has been made to love — that

affections have been implanted in his very being that compel him to love those most who are in his eyes most lovely, or who are most near to him in the intercourse of daily life; when you consider that he is the offspring of a loving God, whose very essence is Love,—whose religion is Love—whose peremptory and authoritative commands enjoin to Love—and all whose heaven and its eternal ages are suffused with Love, —when thus affection to your friend is the very element in which you are placed and fenced by God—how can you but weep and lament, even although you admit the operation of divine love in it all, when repulsive death comes and seizes upon that friend, and a separation is made for ever in time? Oh, if there were no love for the living, there would be no sorrow for the dead; but it is this love for the living—for the dear ones that are around us — that creates and intensifies this sorrow when death comes and carries them away. And this is a distinguishing feature of humanity. It is seldom

seen elsewhere among the other works of God. For when one tree of the field is cut down, others grow on all unconcerned as before. When one flower is plucked from the bush, others will bud and bloom, and diffuse their fragrance all around, regardless of what has taken place. Even the brutes can part with their kind without one visible emotion being shown or sign made. But when in the higher and more Godlike region of humanity —a humanity adorned and redeemed by the Son of God — when in some warm happy home there a lamb is stolen from the fold —an idol of the heart is carried away by death — then the very wickedness of earth is arrested, and the minstrelsy of heaven is silenced by the cries of the bereaved; and the heart may be stilled and silenced, but not lightened, by the thought that it is THE LORD WHO GAVE THAT HATH TAKEN AWAY.

II. *Then, again, that such sorrow for the departed is neither unnatural nor unreasonable, will appear further if you consider that*

it has been an oft-repeated characteristic in the lives of the best and greatest of men in all ages of the Church's history.

Sorrow for the dead is no new or exceptional thing in the world—an excrescence of degenerate ages — a product of weak and effeminate minds. On the contrary, it has run parallel with time and death, and been keenly felt in the halls of princes and nobles as well as in the huts of peasants. The past and the present here meet on an equal footing. There are some things which time in its rapid progress has swept away, and which with its destroying finger it has obliterated from the earth, but sorrow for the dead is not one of them. Arts and sciences, and kingdoms even—cities great and famous that once stood and flourished like monarchs by the sea — systems and things apparently as enduring as the firmament of heaven, have disappeared from the knowledge and observation of men; but sorrow for the dead still moves the hearts and saddens the countenances of the best and noblest of men. The

grave never closes over one but there are some tears shed for him or for her. No funeral procession darkens the streets but it suggests to us darker and more sorrowful hearts at home. And in this respect mourners now only resemble the great and good of former days. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob mourned for their dead. Aaron, and Eli, and Samuel lamented the fatal calamities that befell their sons. David, who rose and washed himself when the adulterous offspring of Bathsheba was no more, has made his lamentations for Saul and Jonathan, and his piercing cries for his beloved Absalom, memorable throughout all time. And passing by the well-known friendships of classic ages, and coming on to New Testament times, what do we behold? The Son of God weeping at a mortal's grave! The compassionate Saviour, the Maker, the Preserver, the Governor and Redeemer of the world, giving public expression to humanity's saddest and most mournful manifestation, by shedding tears at Lazarus's tomb.

It is therefore no new or trivial phase of life you exhibit when you weep for your dead —when in the dark hour of midnight, or by the silent sepulchre, or in places fresh and fragrant with the memory of the departed, you weep for those whose faces you shall behold no more upon earth. It is nothing of which you need be ashamed, or in the doing of which you may fear that you are transgressing some divine law. On the contrary, you are thereby giving expression to one of humanity's noblest and most tender manifestations. You are doing what Christ Himself did when He was in the world—and you are showing that, although in the stirring bustle of life other hearts may be forgetful of those who are gone, you at least still love them, still think of them, and miss them in the world. It may be, indeed, that you will keep your sorrow to yourself and your God—that, conscious of the ordinary thoughts, and naturally cold or at least doubtful affections of men and women around you in regard to your grief, and how incapable they are of en-

tering into your sorrow, you will reserve it for moments of solitude and retirement—when, for instance, night draws its curtain around you, or when some relic or treasure of the departed comes unexpectedly into view, or when you go from the contentions of the living to hold sweet communion with the sleeping dust of the dead. And if it be true that they are "*blessed who mourn*," as the Saviour tells us they are; if it be true that God is the God of *all* consolation as well as of *all* grace, and that there is a storehouse in heaven filled with the blood-bought comforts of a loving Saviour for His bereft children upon earth; if it be true that our great High Priest and Intercessor has the same tenderness and sympathy above which He showed in Jairus's house and by Lazarus's grave upon earth; if it be true that scenes of sorrow awaken the deepest interest among heaven's glorified throngs, and that there are many there who have come out of great tribulation,—then you may be sure that you are on the highway to a glorious destiny, and

in the company of all that is great and good in the universe of God. "For it became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

III. *But, moreover, that this sorrow for the departed is in no way unnatural or unreasonable, will farther appear if you consider what great and good results the Almighty can extract from it.*

It is only a little way into the operations of the Divine Being that we are permitted —or indeed able—to go, and it is only a partial light which even the fullest teachings of revelation throw over them. We may be sure of this, however, that the chastening hand of God is never laid upon any man or woman but for a purpose, and a purpose that is good. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," is a well-known Bible doctrine. Just as design is manifest throughout all the material universe, animate and inanimate,

and beneficent design too — although this has been questioned in such things as the formidable weapons of beasts of prey—just as I say beneficent design is so manifest throughout all the works of God, so it is manifest also in every believer's trial. The Supreme Being—He who has given to the heavens such glory, and to the earth such beauty—never darkens the home of any of His people with sorrow—and that, too, in spite of all their efforts, prayers, and tears—but for some great and good end. Just as He has a use in heaven for the dear one He takes away from us here, so we believe He has a purpose also in that load of grief that is now bowing us down. Not that God delights in sorrow, or that He is unconcerned about the sufferings of a redeemed humanity. On the contrary, we affirm that it must be with the greatest reluctance that He—whose very essence is love—permits the misery of a single human being. True, indeed, we are often perplexed at the tremendousness of some of the divine penalties, and the severity

and rigour of many of nature's operations; that under the government of one whom we are taught to look up to as our Father in heaven and Saviour, there should be such apparent vengeance, and often such a speedy infliction of the penalty at the violation of some natural or moral law. Such things, I say, often perplex us. But then we are taught to consider not only that all divine laws are important, and cannot be infringed with impunity, and moreover, not only that this is an imperfect scene—the scene of a fallen race—but that both nature and providence are but partial revealers of God, and that if we wish to know about God's mercy and love to us, we must not dwell too much upon the operations of a universe polluted by sin, and that is yet destined to be burned up, but we must go to the Cross of Christ and contemplate the sacrifice that was offered there; for it was in reference to it, and to it alone, and to none of the phenomena of the physical universe, that the apostle exclaimed, "Herein is love."

And therefore we infer that it must be for the best of ends and the most merciful and glorious of purposes that God robes us in sorrow, and takes from us often—not the aged and infirm, not the exhausted and fatigued, not the useless and the wicked, not those who feel that they have had enough of life, and who stand there like withered trunks among the forests of living and loving men, but—the best and fairest of all our household flowers. Surely that Divine Being who put into the mouth of Nathan the prophet the parable of the "ewe lamb," and who threatened and executed vengeance upon him who, having plenty of his own, yet robbed the poor man of his treasure, must have a great, beneficent, and pressing purpose in view which we cannot presently understand, when He sends death into our home, and plucks from our very bosom the child that was nestling there. Is it that this coarse world was too rough and stormy for so sweet a spirit, so delicate a frame? Or is it that there were other friends above that were waiting for

and wearying to see the much coveted one? Was there some home there she had to adorn —some too dim firmament in which as a star she had to shine—some useful work of the loving Father she had to do—some shining angel she had to accompany on messages of gentlest mercy to mankind, that thus she was removed so soon and suddenly from us? And, moreover, were our hearts too worldly —too much or too little set on the prized one, and had our souls to be disciplined in exercises of faith and hope and love, and better prepared for the duties of time, and for the immortal honours of eternity? Are these, brethren, or such as these, the reasons why God darkens your home and mine, and carries away the best and dearest of our friends? Unquestionably, there are the germs of truth here; and in these dark moments of life, when night and day we are in misery and can get no rest, when we find it difficult to say from the heart, "Thy will be done," when all seems dark to us as the starless midnight sky, — even then the

brightest of heaven's lights may be shining over us, and the *best* that a loving God can do is actually being done.

IV. *But it may be said that this sorrow for the departed is wholly inconsistent with the richness and fulness of Christian hope, with that stillness and silence which God's people should manifest to the unbelieving around them, and which become the children of a loving Father who has already given "His beloved Son," and with that Son promised all good things.*

If the body of your dear friend is yet to be raised from the tomb a glorified body, and if the spirit is even now treading the celestial mansions, happier and more joyous than it ever was in its happiest moments upon earth, why this mourning and these tears? If the gates of the everlasting city have been entered through which patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and the saints of former days have passed, as well as many that you have known and

loved upon earth, and if the home of the loving Father has been reached, what more could you desire? What better destiny could you wish for your dear one than this, even supposing you had the choice? What better friend could you intrust your child to—or your brother, or sister, or husband, or wife—than the very God who gave being first, and who, in the manifestations of His providence and grace, has been your unwearied Helper and Friend? What higher or nobler portion could you wish for the spirit that has left you than the crown of glory that fadeth not away—the society of angels and archangels, seraphim and cherubim, the loving company of the redeemed, and the still more loving presence of a Saviour who, when here on earth, took the very infants in His arms and blessed them, and for whose heavenly presence the greatest of apostles could willingly leave everything that was dear and interesting upon earth? Is this world so perfectly happy and safe that you would wish your dear one back

again? Are there no storms and shipwrecks here—no dangers to the warm and trusting heart of youth—no weary and fainting spirits—no saddened countenances and unsatisfied desires—even among those who are arrayed in soft clothing and live in king's courts, that thus you would wish the spirit of the ransomed one back again from the glorified homes of heaven to feed among the husks and to endure the bitternesses and reproaches of time? Ah! blessed be God, it is difficult to answer such questions as these. They are the stay and support of the soul in many a sorrowful hour. They are religion's and providence's contributions to the spirit that is crushed by bereavement, and they are backed up by the solemn utterances of Him who, even after He had taken His place of honour at the Father's right hand, returned to Patmos' lonely isle, and said to His suffering apostle, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore."

Nevertheless, brethren, we cannot help weeping for our dead, even although we may cherish the brightest hopes regarding them, and, moreover, be the special favourites of the God of all grace. We are only *human*. We are the denizens of a world of sorrow. We have not yet reached that land where sorrow and sighing are for ever to flee away. Our dear ones, for whom we mourn, are not with us. We miss them every moment of our existence—by night and by day, in our homes and in our walks, by our doors and by our firesides, in the excitements of the crowded city, and among the sweet and solemn services of the house of God. The fears and anxieties that beset us often when they were away from us even for a day, beset us now—now when their bodies are among the buried dead, and when their spirits have entered a region regarding which the wisest of all earth's wise ones have not been able to tell us all we desire to know. We believe they are with Christ, "which is far better"; still they are not

with us as in the happy days that have gone by. And as it is God's presence that makes heaven happy, so it was God's sweet gifts to us that made earth happy, and His withdrawal of them that makes it now so miserable. Then, again, when we go to the tomb —however richly or lovingly we may dress it—it is only silence and thoughts of corruption that meet us there. And, moreover, we know that this separation is to be *forever in time.* Day will come, but it will not bring them back. Night will return, but the faces and forms of the departed will cheer our homes and gladden our firesides no more. Even spring will tempt us with its flowers and summer with its fruits. The sun will shine into our homes, and gild our pathway in the common duties of life. The merry faces and voices of youth will startle us in our musings, and all nature's objects and creatures will minister to our delight. But, ah! the face, and the voice, and the form that was OURS, alas! we shall see it no more; and the thought of a world around us,

so full, and joyous, and happy, will make us all the more sad to think that our home is so empty—OUR DEAR ONE GONE.

V. And yet, strange to say, sad though the condition of the mourner be—an object of great interest and sympathy to the compassionate Saviour—and though this is a phase of life which all in turn have to pass through, unless, indeed, death takes them away first among their kindred, yet *there is almost no aspect of life in general so repulsive, no condition of the individual's being about which the outer world of mankind cares less, than that of sorrowing for the dead.* Few have the skill to minister to, or the patience to tolerate, grief. Just as soldiers in battle hurl their dead comrades into rapidly-made graves, and rush on again to meet the foe in the stirring scenes of mortal combat, so the surging world of life rolls past the door of the mourner and the resting-places of the dead, regardless of the sorrow of the one or the humiliated treasures

of the other. Business, pleasure, worldly contention, the petty strifes of societies, and even of churches, monopolise, for the most part, the attention of mankind, regardless of the solemn and profitable lessons of mortality which God, in His providence, is ever reading to men. Not only so, but there are times when the heart of the worldling will launch its bitterest dart at the spirit that is crushed by bereavement, and when, after the first impulse of sympathy has subsided, it will return to more than its ancient condition of indifference and unconcern. Persons who know little or nothing about death and its ravages until it enters their own home, are often angry with the bereaved, and garrulous and flippant about resignation and submission, and the other duties that they think proper in a season of sorrow, as if they knew all or felt any, or as if wisdom received its highest embodiment in them when they sought *all at once* to convert into *cheery worldlings* the hearts which the Saviour has purposely

smitten with sorrow and robed in sackcloth. And all this just shows us that the aspect of grief is not a pleasant one to the world. Christian though much of that world be, and professing to yield homage to a sorrowing Saviour, yet the tones and dress and society of the mourner are avoided, and the tendency or desire of mere onlookers is to think of sorrow as seldom, and to avoid the subjects of it as much, as they can.

Nevertheless, sorrow for the dead is a thing from which we will not be divorced even if we could, and which we cannot, for a time at least, even if we would. Notwithstanding the pain which it may cause to the heart, and the injury it may do to the physical system, yet body and soul together must share in and sympathise with the calamity that has taken place. And we believe that God intends that we should feel the blow, because it is through the very depth of this feeling that He communicates His comforting grace — His richest and choicest blessings to the soul.

And hence the propriety and sacredness of this sorrow. It is a sorrow that survives the tomb. Death may rob us of all we hold dear—sweep away, as with a whirlwind, the forms of those we love—but it cannot pluck from our hearts the affection that we bear to them, or deprive us of the holy communings we have with them, even when they are gone.

"We love them—love them yet!
But is our love returned?
Is memory's hearth now cold and dark,
Where once the heart-fire burned?
Nor do the labourers, now gone home,
Look for the weary ones to come?

We wrong them by the thought,
Affections cannot die;
Man is still man where'er he goes—
And oh, how strong the tie
Which links us as with fetters fast
Unto the future and the past.

Death would be dark indeed
If with this mortal shroud
We threw off all the sympathies
That in our being crowd,
And entered on the spirit-land
A stranger 'mid a stranger band.

Far pleasanter to think
That each familiar face
Now gazes on us, as of old,
From its mysterious place,
With love that neither death nor change
Hath power to sever or estrange."

Yes, blessed be God, love for the departed is a thing which survives the ravages of death—which lives on and burns like a fire within us, day after day and year after year, even when the objects of that love have vanished from our sight, and when all that remains to us of those fair forms and loving countenances is nothing but mouldering dust. Not only so, but the heart of the true mourner ever resents with indignation any premature attempt to wean it from its grief. It feels as if it were a wrong done to the dead—as if it were a callous insensibility to the great calamity that has happened in the world. Has death, the individual says to himself, robbed me of my friend — cut down the very treasure of my heart? Has this ruin and desolation seized upon the form that walked by my side, that sat at my

table, that attended me in my daily walks, that went with me to the house of God, that rejoiced when I rejoiced and wept when I wept? and shall I all at once go on in life as before, rush into the world's excitements, businesses, and pleasures as if nothing of consequence had happened? Shall this solemn arrest which the Almighty has put upon my thoughts and conduct be broken through, and my outward actions and external demeanour belie and be at total variance with the burning anguish of my soul? No; such a manifestation of heartlessness and inconsideration, if it were possible in the case of a true mourner, would be a libel on humanity. The blow that has fallen on my friend has, through that friend, fallen upon me. And as I think of her or of his condition now—how occupied, where employed, what home is now sheltering the gentle spirit, what society it is now enjoying—and as vivid and cutting thoughts of the corruption of the tomb steal in upon the soul, however faithfully I may strive to perform life's duties,

yet, like the true children of a sorrowing Saviour, who should ever be bearing about with them the dying of their Lord, every waking moment of my existence for days, and it may be for years to come, I shall carry *this sorrow* in my heart.

VI. *Nevertheless, blessed be God, sorrow for the departed hath both its alleviations and consolations, its blessings and mercies.*

The Almighty, who is so rich and beneficent in other things, cannot be niggardly or distant in such a season as this. Even the poor mother, we believe, may have hope of her profligate, who has died when and where she knows not, if she has borne him often in her prayers to a throne of grace, and commended him to that God who is the wanderer's friend, and who fills the whole universe with His gracious presence. How many alleviations may we have to our sorrow then, how many consolations and comforts may be ours in regard to those who have been taken away, who, when on earth, were surrounded by

Christian influences, and were the humble though imperfect servants of Christ! Moreover, let us remember, it is to comfort the mourner that the Holy Spirit has been commissioned from heaven to earth. It is to point the wistful spirits of the bereaved to sinless and sorrowless regions above, that the Church exercises its functions, and scatters its heralds over the wide world. And time too alleviates sorrow. Each passing day is weakening its power over us, and extracting its bitterness from the soul. And business, and duty, and recreation do the same. God does not leave us wholly desolate, even although He may afflict us sorely. He has many ways of lightening up the gloom, and making the rayless and starless night endurable, if not happy. When we see the miseries of others—when we hear of the sad shipwreck of this one and that one that started fairly and promised well in the pathway of life—are we not sometimes glad that our dear ones are safe, our lambs sheltered in their heavenly Father's house?

The storm that rolls over us cannot reach them. The cares, anxieties, disappointments, regrets, and errors with which we are all familiar, and that have so often wrung our hearts, never can touch those whose work on earth has been soon over, and whom God has called early home. Oh, how purely and beautifully they lived, and how peacefully and contentedly they died! Their memory is dear to us as our own God-given lives, and it will be fresh and fragrant for ever. Years hence, if God spares us — even when we grow old, and feeble, and infirm — wherever we are, at home or abroad, we shall think of them; and when death comes to us,—when we lie prostrate in some room—we know not what one — to deliver up the life we have received from God,—and when faces, it may be strange and unknown, surround our death-bed, lonely and solitary we may feel ourselves then, but the remembrance of former happy days will come back upon us, and the memory of the dear departed will

lighten up our gloom, and we will leave the world with satisfaction and gladness, not merely because we are going to be with Christ, but because we shall hope to meet at the very portals of glory the dear ones we loved so much upon earth, and whose absence has caused us so bitterly to mourn.

Now one great practical lesson which I would seek to deduce from this subject is this—*our duty to the living.* Never let us say that we are sincerely mourning for the dead, if we are careless and unconcerned about those whom God in His providence has still left to us. Never let our sorrow for those who are gone interfere with our duty to those who are left. They may not by some strange law of our nature have the same attractions in our eyes, the same charms that those have who have been taken away; for, rightly or wrongly, we always think most of those who are gone. Still, let us be warned by the past, and consider our privileges, in having some dear ones still left to us. It is when death comes

that we feel the value of the departed as we never did before. It is then that we realise the treasure we have lost. It is then that regrets arise so painfully in our hearts at duties supposed to be left undone, kindnesses neglected, real or fancied harsh words that may have been spoken, and that we wish, moreover, the past would return, in order that we may retrieve our errors and atone for our shortcomings. Oh what happiness would be ours, we say to ourselves, if that past would come back—if the wheels of time would reverse themselves, and restore to us the scenes and friends of former days! But ah! it cannot be,—that past cannot return. And therefore with an assured belief in the all-sufficiency of Christ, and in the pardoning mercy of our God, let us now perform our duty well to the living; and let us hope that when the checkered and cloudy days of our earthly pilgrimage shall end, we shall be admitted to a world of restored friendships, and pure and unending joys.

The above thoughts are the product of a season of sorrow. They have been occasioned by the death of one whose early and somewhat sudden removal has made a blank in my own and other lives, and left an indelible mark upon our hearts. And now I conclude this tribute to the dear one's memory with these beautiful words of Resignation and Hope, with the fervent prayer that what is here stated may, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, be beneficial and comforting to others.

"She is not dead—the child of our affection,
But gone into that school
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,
And Christ Himself doth rule.

In that great cloister's stillness and seclusion,
By guardian angels led,
Safe from temptation, safe from sin's pollution,
She lives whom we call dead.

Day after day we think what she is doing
In those bright realms of air;
Year after year her tender steps pursuing,
Behold her grown more fair.

Thus do we walk with her, and keep unbroken,
The bond which nature gives,
Thinking that our remembrance though unspoken,
May reach her where she lives.

Not as a child shall we again behold her;
For when, with raptures wild,
In our embraces we again enfold her,
She will not be a child.

But a fair maiden in her Father's mansion,
Clothed with celestial grace,
And beautiful with all the soul's expansion,
Shall we behold her face."

SERMON II.

Heaven:

Its Changed Relationships, Exalted Natures, but Perpetuated and Enduring Love.

LUKE xx. 35, 36.

"But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."

THERE is perhaps no subject of human thought more transcendently pure than that of heaven. A halo of peculiar sanctity and glory surrounds the very mention of that blessed world. As God is the Supreme *Being* in the universe, so heaven is its choicest *place*. The devout mind thinks of it as a region of

indescribable beauty and happiness; the spirit crushed by bereavement as the home of immortality. Indeed, no one can reflect on heaven, however momentarily, without experiencing a certain elevation of thought. Its thrones, crowns, and palms—its homes of peace and love—its sainted denizens and rejoicing hosts in the presence of their King—throw a charm of indescribable sweetness and beauty around that blessed world. Inspiration represents it to us as the dwelling-place of God—the home of all that is good, pure, and loving in the universe—the final resting-place of Christ's sojourning Church, the abode of our dear departed friends, and the actual realisation of higher and more perfect forms of beauty than any that are imaged forth in nature, Scripture, or the human mind. Of all worlds, this is the best, grandest, and most enduring — guarded securely against evil, and free from those corrupting and withering influences that have produced such havoc among the other works of God. And, moreover, the vastness of heaven surpasses all

efforts at conception. Into its ample homes multitudes have been passing from every age and clime. Christ speaks of it as having "many mansions." He tells us that "many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." By His death "many sons" are to be brought to glory. In the Apostle John's days, according to the sublime vision of the Apocalypse, the beloved disciple beheld "before the throne and before the Lamb" not only the symbolic thousands of little Israel, "but *a great multitude*, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues"; and still do heaven's gates stand open—still are earthly homes being emptied of their fairest and best—still is God from His throne, and by His providence and grace, calling upon men to "come up hither," that they may enter upon a nobler life, and enjoy the heavenly fellowship of His own dear Son.

And yet it must be kept in mind that this

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great and glorious world, with which the Christian consciousness of all ages has been so familiar, and towards which our hearts are so often aspiring, is entirely a subject of revelation and an object of faith. Science and philosophy can lay no claim to the discovery of heaven, whatever they may have to say as to its verification. No eager explorer of the physical system among all these bright worlds has been able to discover this peerless realm. No weeping child of sorrow even, in its day of bereavement yearning after the spirit that has gone, has been able to catch one glimpse of the sainted throngs that surround the throne, or to hear the faintest echo of the song which they sing. All is silence and obscurity to the ear and the eye of sense. And even the important and authoritative announcements of revelation do not at times satisfy the eager longing of the soul. No night, no death, no sorrow, no sea with its roaring and separating waters, no ordinances of sun and moon; but a city with streets of gold, gates of pearl,

walls of jasper,—or a paradise, with a river and a tree of life,—or a Sabbath, with its holy rest and ceaseless worship: these and suchlike intimations, although they nourish the hopes, do not satisfy the cravings of the immortal spirit. On the contrary, they only stimulate its curiosity and quicken its sensibilities all the keener to know more of its final home, and the nature of that endless life which it is to lead in heaven. But, nevertheless, God has thrown an impenetrable veil over the grandeur of this scene. He has hidden it from all mortal eyes, and no doubt for the very best of reasons; because the glory of it, were a full revelation permitted, would unsettle our minds, interfere with our proper duties, darken all our homes, and do to the sun at mid-day what it does to the feeble stars. It would make us eager to leap from the struggle to the reward, from the conflict to the crown, from the needed discipline of time to the immortal honours of heaven; and therefore does God wisely conceal this blessed world from our

view, that He may thereby all the more surely quicken our hope, and exercise us in that patience which is inseparably linked with the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

And yet it must not be supposed that we have not most important, and even authentic and particular, information given us in regard to heaven. Here is a passage, for instance, from Christ's own lips, in which the existence of heaven is assumed as a fact, and where our Lord proceeds to describe some of the laws under which the happy inhabitants live. They "neither marry nor are given in marriage;" they "die" no more; "they are equal unto the angels;" and "are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." The changed state and exalted condition of the Christian dead—for at death the soul passes on to its reward—are here, then, represented to us by no less an authority than Christ Himself. Contrary to the evidence of our senses, which at the moment of death points us only to silent and wasting forms, or to the teach-

ing of the natural world, which reveals to us only a cold and unsympathetic materialism, the divine Redeemer here distinctly recognises the collateral existence of a spiritual world, and shows us the higher natures and nobler relationships that are there. In answering the subtle questionings of certain Sadducees in regard to the operation in eternity of an old and obsolete marriage law, our blessed Lord here announces the deathless condition of those we are accustomed to speak of as dead,—He points out to us their angelic altitude, and their perfect freedom from the transitory relationships of time. Those for whom we mourn on earth, by whose graves we weep, after whose vanished spirits we roam in eager thought, and scan the whole heaven of existence, are here seen to be at home in their Father's house, and now His children alone and for ever. And all this would be satisfactory enough, nay, most consolatory to the heart, were it not that it suggests to our minds changes in heaven that are apparently inconsistent with

our ideas of perfect happiness. "They neither marry nor are given in marriage," says Christ. Are husband and wife then not to walk together there? They are no longer the children of men, but "the children of God." Are parent and child to be unknown there? Are the dearest and most important relationships of time to be obliterated and unknown in that blessed world? Are the hopes of those fair youths, who have been prematurely snatched away by death before the bridal morn dawned, never to be reawakened or realised on that sinless and sorrowless shore? Is there to be such a revolution in the arrangements of our heavenly Father's house, that the sweetest and dearest ties of time are to be broken, the past completely forgotten, and all new and strange to us in that other and better world? Our Lord's language, in answer to such questionings as these, is singularly free from all figurative or ambiguous meaning; and it indicates to us, I apprehend, most clearly these great truths, that there will

be *changed relationships* and *exalted natures*, but *perpetuated and enduring love in heaven.*

I. And in attempting to elucidate such an important and authoritative declaration from the lips of the Lord Jesus, let me suggest, first of all, that *the relationships of time will be changed in heaven, because the great object of their existence here will be attained otherwise there.*

The great object of the marriage relationship, and indeed of all the relationships of time, is to produce *happiness.* No doubt they have other and subordinate ends, but this is the principal one. In regard to marriage, for instance, it acts here as a compensating law to make up for the perpetual ravages of death. But in heaven, where they die no more, where the resistless influences of the great destroyer will never be permitted to enter, this relationship will be unnecessary, while the great end of its existence here—namely, happiness—will be secured otherwise. The beneficent character

of the Supreme Being, seen in so many of His works and ways, is seen in this also in adapting the various relationships of the social system so as to produce the happiness of His creatures. The relation of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, master and servant, monarch and people, pastor and flock, and indeed all the relationships of the social system, have this as their great end—namely, the happiness of those who live under them. Whatever men may say of these relationships, or however much they may pervert them, yet they have all been instituted by God for the noblest purposes in the great mystery of human life. Just as God designed a beautiful world when He reared this stupendous universe, so He designed a happy one when He peopled it with sentient and intelligent beings, and instituted the various relationships of the social scale. No doubt God has been frustrated in His design by the disobedience and rebellion of His creatures, so that misery has often taken the place of happiness. But

nevertheless the design of the Divine Being was good, the intention was beneficent, and the many sweet experiences of life which we have all had—the happy homes of multitudes —the endearing hours of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, friend and friend—the secret and untold loves that have pervaded the hearts of myriads,—all prove the beneficence of the Divine Being, and that God takes pleasure not in the death, but in the life of His creatures, and not merely in their life, but in their perpetuated happiness and joy.

But yet, at the same time, it must be kept in mind that this happiness which is produced through these earthly relationships is an inferior happiness to that which is enjoyed in heaven. Heaven is the higher place, the nobler and more perfect scene, the dwelling-place of God, and the glorious intelligences there necessarily occupy a higher platform of existence than that which men do here. It is natural to suppose, therefore, that the happiness which is enjoyed in that blessed

world is far superior to anything that has ever been known in time. Even had man not fallen, the happiness of Eden must have been an inferior happiness to that which is enjoyed in heaven. And not only so, but the happiness which is derived through marriage and the other relationships of this life, is inferior in this other respect, namely, that it is a *mediate* happiness —that is to say, it is a happiness which is produced through *means*—through conditions that are necessarily attached to an inferior state. It does not come to the soul directly from God, who is the source of all happiness, as He is of all life and love, and who alone can satisfy the soul; but it comes through means—means, no doubt, that are of divine institution, but nevertheless *means*. Indeed, the emotional nature of man stands very much in the same relationship to God as the mind does to the material universe. It is a well-known fact that all the knowledge which any man possesses of this great physical system — earth, sea, and sky — is derived entirely through the organs of sense,

and not from any direct cognisance which the mind has of that system. And so is it with the soul and the happiness which flows to it from these earthly relationships. It is a mediate happiness. It is a happiness flowing to it through channels — agencies that stand between it and its great and living Source. Notwithstanding a providential and a spiritual Presence, the soul is in this world away from God, away from His home, away from the living beings that surround Him, away from any actual realisation of His glorious and loving presence. But when heaven shall be reached, when this body of flesh shall be put off, when the gates of the celestial city shall open to us, and the arms of the loving Father shall enfold us, then we shall throw these earthly relationships aside, and men will neither marry nor be given in marriage ; they will no longer be the children of men, but all—masters, servants, monarchs, people, pastors, flocks, male and female—all will be the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.

And it will help, I think, to reconcile us to

this new and altered state of things, if we keep in mind this important fact, that the happiness which is produced through these earthly relationships is not only an inferior happiness to that which is enjoyed in heaven, but that it is an *imperfect* happiness. The golden pipes that convey it to us have been polluted, the channels through which it flows have been soiled, and it flows, moreover, into polluted hearts. Sin has injected misery into all the fondest and dearest ties of time. And as a proof of this, you have only to reflect on what is happening, and what has happened in the history of our world, and you will see that all these noble institutions of heaven have been perverted and abused in every age. How often, for instance, has the sweet and loving heart of woman—created by God to draw very much of its earthly happiness from the husband of her youth—been broken, crushed, torn asunder in all its parts, by the cruelty and brutality of him who vowed that he would love and honour her all her days! And how often

has the gentle child's happiness been destroyed by the neglect and indifference of some savage parent; and that of the aged parent by the ingratitude of his offspring! How often has friend injured friend, brother injured brother, the members of the same family or community risen up in deadly hostility against each other, and nursed and cherished malignity or hate, until God has quenched it in the forced silence of the grave! And stretching out into the outer relationships of life, how often has an entire neighbourhood suffered from the selfishness or caprice of some individual member of it! How often have whole kingdoms been desolated by war, cities razed to their foundations, busy industries destroyed, great populations scattered, homes thrown into mourning and woe, and all the endearing relationships of time torn up and destroyed through the passion or ambition of some powerful but tyrannical monarch! These are some of the results of the relationships of time. But when heaven shall be reached,

when the employments and the enjoyments of that better scene shall be entered on, then each child of God will be independent of every other, and dependent only upon Him, so that if it were even possible for anything to hurt or to destroy in all that holy mountain, the effort to do so would fall powerless upon the immortal natures that are there. The great family of the redeemed, gathered out of every nation and age, will have one Father, one God, one Saviour, one enlightening and all-sanctifying Spirit; and though dwelling in many mansions, they will all have ONE HOME.

II. But another and important idea contained in our Lord's words is this, that *humanity is to experience an exaltation of nature in heaven.*

This elevation of nature is indicated to us by two circumstances—namely, an equality with angels, and a freedom from death. Indeed, it is so put by Christ as if the one were the cause of the other. "Neither can

they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels;" that is to say, they are equal unto the angels, and therefore they die no more. And what a blessed world must that be where there is no more death, and none of the effects or ravages of the great destroyer —none of the broken hearts, desolate homes, and tearful countenances that are seen everywhere here! How different from this sinful and sorrow-stricken scene, where the very "air is full of farewells to the dying, and mournings for the dead." Here, as has been well said—

"The dead are everywhere,
The mountain-side, the plain, the wood profound,
All the wide earth, the fertile and the fair,
Is one vast burial-ground.

Within the populous street,
In solitary homes, in places high,
In pleasure's dome, where pomp and luxury meet,
Men bow themselves to die.

The sunlight gilds the walls
Of kingly sepulchres inwrought with brass,
And the long shadow of the cypress falls
Athwart the common grass.

The living of gone time
Builded their glorious cities by the sea,
And awful in their greatness sat sublime,
As if no change could be.

There was the eloquent tongue,
The poet's heart, the sage's soul was there;
And loving women, with their children young,
The faithful and the fair.

They were, but they are not;
Suns rose and set, and earth put on her bloom,
Whilst man, submitting to the common lot,
Went down into the tomb.

And still amid the wrecks
Of mighty generations passed away,
Earth's honest growth, the fragrant wild flower decks
The tomb of yesterday."

Inspiration, however, assures us that there will be no death in heaven, for we will have reached that sinless and angelic altitude where the "last enemy" will not be permitted to frighten or harass us more.

And yet this exaltation of nature is just what we might have expected, not only from the precedent exaltation of Christ, our great and living Head, but from what we know of

the character of God, and the principles upon which the affairs of this world are conducted. A wise moral governor—leaving out of view penal arrangements — would never create beings who, it may be, have several stages of existence to pass through so as to proceed from a higher to a lower state of life. The progression would be not on a descending, but on an ascending scale. Like prudent guests at a feast following the Lord's counsel, and who take the lowest seat, expecting that the master of the house will bid them go up higher, mankind expect, by the obedience and death of Christ, to be raised from the weaknesses, trials, sorrows, and satieties of time, to the thrones and enjoyments of heaven. And were it otherwise—were it the *design* of heaven to sink men in the scale of being in another world rather than elevate them—the powers given at first would deteriorate with use rather than improve. But this is not the case. The faculties, both of mind and body, improve by exercise and growth in every

virtuous and well-regulated life, showing that the design of heaven with mankind is an upward and an onward one. No doubt there is sin, decay, and death. But these, we are taught to believe, are new elements introduced into man's original constitution; and even they have not only been provided against by Christ, but are so sanctified by God, who converts evils into blessings, as to become ladders to the soul's greatness in its upward, onward flight to heaven. And then it must be remembered that heaven is the higher place — the nobler scene. All Scripture language gives us the grandest conception of heaven. It is natural to suppose, therefore, that the natures that are to be taken there will be proportionally elevated. And this onward progress of things as a principle in the divine government is actually shadowed forth to us in the history of our world. There was a time, geologists tell us, when men could not have lived upon the earth; when its surface, now covered with cities, towns, and busy populations,

could not have supported a single blade of grass. And some have a fancy that these great and rolling worlds that now crowd the fields of space, are as yet unable to support animal and vegetable life, but that as they revolve round their axes and their suns, they are undergoing a probationary process which will enable them ultimately to exhibit such scenes of existence as are now witnessed here. Is this the case, or something like this the case, with the material universe, with the physical system, which in all its parts is such a mirror of the divine glory, and such an expositor of God's designs; and shall we gather nothing from it regarding the progress, the advancement, the enlightenment of the soul, that highest part of man, which once bore God's image, and more especially when the indications of the physical system harmonise so beautifully with the prognostications of revelation? Reason tells us that matter cannot be eternal, that both it and force tend and must yield to waste and decay; and the most authoritative of

all our Lord's apostles assures us that the earth and all that is therein is to be burned up. Then, again, there is a craving in the human breast after eternal life—and there is, moreover, an onward progress of material things; and Jesus Christ tells us of the house of many mansions that is being prepared in the heavens. Moreover, the Spirit of God is carrying on a mighty regenerative work in the hearts of men, and the results of that work, great and momentous though they be, will not be seen till heaven's peaceful scenes have been reached, and its enduring enjoyments experienced; and in conformity with all this, holy apostles, following their Master's example, still call upon men to rise rather than sink in the scale of moral excellence and purity—to set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth; and many in all ages, animated by such teaching, and strengthened by heaven's own grace, have actually sighed for that better country — that city "whose builder and maker is God."

It is therefore in perfect keeping with the analogies of nature and the teaching of Scripture, what our Lord here tells us—that the redeemed in heaven are now equal unto the angels. We hail such a declaration with feelings of mingled gratitude and comfort, because it contrasts so agreeably in our minds with the sad sights and thoughts that crowd upon us in our day of bereavement. We know comparatively little of the angelic world, but we know enough to be satisfied with the exalted rank which our beloved dead have now assumed in their Father's house. Angels, according to Scripture testimony, are the choicest beings in creation, and far superior to man. They have gifts, powers, and privileges which we do not possess. Their inexpressible loveliness not only raises them above every other created being, but renders them fit dwellers in the highest and holiest region in the universe; and boundless though that universe be, stretching away into regions which the eye and mind of man cannot reach, yet they can

make their power to be felt, and convey the messages of the Eternal to its utmost boundaries. One of them destroyed the first-born of Egypt—another saved Jerusalem—another slew the army of Sennacherib—multitudes of them, arrayed in all the glory of the Godhead, heralded the advent of Christ—one is to sound the resurrection trump, when the dust of sleeping myriads shall come to life again; whilst, as regards their benevolent tendencies, Scripture tells us that they rejoice at the repentance of a sinner, and that they are all "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation."

It is to such an altitude as this, then, that redeemed humanity is to be raised by Christ; and it is this glorious and happy altitude that our dear departed friends are now enjoying with Christ in heaven. No wonder that they would not come back to us. No wonder that the spirits clothed with immortality—the possessors of a deathless life and a sinless heaven—would not return to the

trials, coldnesses, vicissitudes, and uncertainties of time. Who among us would? Who would exchange the nature of the angel for that of the man? What monarch would lay aside his robes of royalty, his influence, power, authority, and all the pomp and circumstance of his high estate, for that of a beggar? What creature of God, lifted high in the scale of being, would be content to go to a lower position? None. We may go higher, but the soul that is within us will not willingly consent to go lower. And God does not wish us to do so. On the contrary, He has given His beloved Son—His best and greatest gift—to win mankind back again to Himself; and His cry is, "Come up hither" —approach nearer and nearer to the Eternal in fellowship, love, purity, grace. And once in heaven, we are there for ever. The inhabitants of that blessed world go no more out. And not only so, but even after we are there we shall seek to rise. We shall act in unison with the divine will. For it is the tendency of all *regenerated* natures to rise,

not to fall—to advance, not to retrograde. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." It is, we believe, the design of heaven in the progress of the ages to make things better, not worse—to evolve new forms of life and beauty out of the old and the dying. Even from the lowest type of life to the highest there is an ascending movement,—worlds, as they revolve, growing richer in material wealth—men rising higher in the scale of virtue and goodness—even angels ascending upward in the life of glory and immortality, and all approaching but never reaching that Supreme One who sits enthroned over all; and therefore we appreciate our Lord's words when He tells us that the redeemed in heaven are now "equal unto the angels," and that therefore they can "die" no more.

III. But another important truth proclaimed by Christ in this striking passage, relating to the state of humanity in heaven,

is the *Fatherhood* of God and the *sonship* of men. They "are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."

This is indeed the one great and enduring relationship of heaven, God the Father of all. And this relationship implies one important thing—namely, Love; for God is Love, and if the parent be love, so must all the children be. But this love is a natural affection of every heart here—it is a phenomenon of time,—and not only so, but lest the holy flame which is generated in our own spiritual nature should languish or expire in this cold, dark, and sinful world, or lest it should centre on unworthy objects, Christ has commissioned His Spirit to communicate supplies of it to His people, that they may be all the more ready when He calls them for the loving homes above. And, moreover, according to the highest authority, this is the one grace that we shall carry with us to heaven. Our faith and hope must be left behind us at death, as we leave our wealth and apparel, and all the

other temporary and tributary things that have contributed to our wellbeing here. But our love goes with us into eternity, and therefore this good and holy grace shall reappear with us again, brightened up by the Redeemer's own power in the streets of the heavenly Jerusalem. And to show how natural all this is, we see how possible it is for important elements to remain with us under the most radical and sweeping changes upon earth. Our bodies, for instance, undergo changes every few years, and yet our identity, consciousness, memory, judgment, feeling, even the very lineaments of the face and gait of the body, remain the same. It is therefore natural to expect that although, in our swift passage from time to eternity, all the relationships of time will depart from us, that yet our love,—that which identifies us with God—that chief adornment of the soul — that principle of our nature, as well as its corresponding emotion, and which manifests itself in loving our neighbour as well as

our God,—it is natural, I say, to suppose that this feeling of the heart and grace of the soul, and which has given us so much happiness and joy upon earth, shall reappear with us again in burning splendour in our heavenly Father's house.

And this notion is in complete accord with the universal anticipation of the Christian world. There will not only be perfect love in heaven among all God's children, but the loves and friendships of former days will be revived. If the emotion and grace go with us there, they will naturally seek out the objects that occupied them so much here. It would be a sad blow to the heart of man were it otherwise. Even the expectation of a holy heaven and an exalted nature would be a poor compensation for the loss of all the fondly cherished memories of the past. It would destroy completely all our conceptions of our heavenly Father's house, and deprive us of much of the comfort that we take to ourselves in days of bereavement, if even the sus-

picion were to enter the mind that there was to be any change there in the character of the affection we cherished here—an affection which made earth so happy, and death and separation so bitter to bear. We expect to meet again, on that sinless and sorrowless shore when we reach it, not merely the same friends that we have been parted from here, but the same old character of friends,—and that too in no strange or alien shapes or forbidding aspects, but with the same forms, faces, charms, and loves—brightened up by the glory of the Redeemer—that we knew so well here, and that were more especially dear to us, when with breaking hearts we were kissing the lips that were being irresistibly stamped with the pale, cold image of death.

And as a proof of this, in addition to what our own scripturally enlightened minds suggest to us, we have only to think what took place in the experience of our Lord. Not only did He assume humanity, with its

shape, qualities, and mental and moral characteristics, when He came into this world, but He reassumed humanity when, after having been under the power of death and in the grave, He appeared again on the morning of the resurrection as the triumphant conqueror over man's most dreaded foe. He was the same Jesus to Mary and the women who followed Him—to Peter, and John, and Thomas, and the other apostles, after His resurrection—that He had been in the days of His ministry upon earth. And not only so, but He is the same Jesus at the Father's right hand. He has carried His humanity, with all its earthly affections, to the skies; and shameful though His death was, ignominious though that treatment was which the Lord of Glory received upon the cross, yet He is not ashamed to be known among the bright galaxy of heaven's hosts as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Thus does Jesus, by His own holy experiences, teach us to connect humanity with heaven—to think of

our living there as we have lived here—to expect to see in that blessed world, when we reach it, the same loving countenances and forms that we now miss so much upon earth; for if it be true that Jesus had one home at Bethany that He loved more than all others, and if He, the great example and pattern of mankind in heaven and on earth, had among His chosen apostles the favoured three, and among these three the favoured one—the beloved disciple; if in this manner divinity tabernacled and manifested itself upon earth, with these special features in it, surely we may reasonably expect that humanity will manifest itself in like manner in heaven, and that when we reach our Father's house, particular friends will meet again, and particular loves be revived. The death of Christ and the work of Christ have not destroyed or revolutionised every principle and law of our nature. These principles remain the same after we are Christians that they were before, and they will remain the same in heaven throughout the ceaseless

ages of eternity. What Christianity does or is doing to us is to purify us, to elevate us, to throw all our thoughts and affections and desires into right channels, so that they may be in perfect and proper accord with the new atmosphere of heaven which we are yet destined to breathe. It has not destroyed our humanity, but only replaced it in more than its pristine glory; and therefore, when we reach heaven, all that is good in the life of that humanity will reappear, while the bad will be taken away, and we and those whom we have known upon earth shall enter upon a career of everlasting happiness and unending life.

IV. Nor can we fail to notice, finally, in this comforting passage of the Word of God, the mention that is made by Christ, and twice made, of *the resurrection;* not His own resurrection, although that was the crowning triumph of the incarnate Redeemer, but the resurrection of His people,—an event in the providence of God that was yet far distant

in the history of time when Christ uttered these words,—when as complete a victory should be gained by the followers of the Lamb over all their earthly enemies, as was gained by Christ Himself when He stood alive again at Joseph's tomb. The blessed inhabitants of heaven are not merely worthy of that world, says Christ, but they are worthy also of the resurrection from the dead. They are not only children of God, but children of the resurrection. Christ knew the comfort that His people needed, and He gave it, even although comfort was not demanded, but mere information. He knew what weeping there would be by graves, —what saddening and depressing thoughts the tomb would produce in all ages of the Church's history,—how the loving hearts of the living would have to think often, and bleed as they thought, of those dear ones that once sat by their side and were clasped in their embrace, but who were now, as far as sense indicated, nothing but mouldering dust; and therefore, lest it should be sup-

posed—which was the grandest hope of the pagan world—that it was the soul only that was to share in the glories of heaven, Christ here identifies the spirits in heaven with the grave, and He tells His people that these blessed denizens of the heavenly world, who are now free from the relationships of time, are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. His mighty work on earth would not have achieved its utmost result even when it had saved the soul from death, snatched it away from the imperfect conditions of time, and set it down as a bright and burning seraph before God's throne. That work would extend to the most secret places of materialism, to the depths of the ocean, and to the gloomy caverns of the tomb; and the latent but irresistible power of the Redeemer would yet be felt throughout all the boundaries of the physical system, just as effectively and as mercifully as it was felt on Galilee's lake when the troubled waters were hushed into a calm. An honour must be put on all these sleeping multitudes

that belong to Jesus. They must rise glorified forms. The fetters must be taken off every limb. The captives of ages and generations must be set free. In short, the divine life in heaven of the soul must have its counterpart in the same divine life upon earth of the body. The process that was gone through by Christ must be gone through by all His people. The throne and the crown were to be won through death and the grave; and therefore, though many ages should elapse before the bodies of all the saints should arise, yet rise they would. The heavens were waiting for their ransomed dust; and the glorious temple above, of which each believer is a stone, should not be completed till the resurrection morn dawned, and the great family of mankind were gathered, soul and body together, into their heavenly Father's house.

V. And now the question naturally arises, What *influence* should these great truths and hopes have upon the life of the Christian

world? Not one certainly leading to indifference or indolence as to the paramount duties of time, but one stimulating to diligence and cheerfulness under the most depressing providences of life. *Especially are such truths and hopes full of comfort to the sorrowing and bereaved.* Like the Sadducees of old, notwithstanding our greater privileges and better light, there are times in our history when we are perplexed and bewildered in our conception of heaven, and when we vainly endeavour to reconcile the conditions of time with the mysteries of eternity. Where is that other world, we often say to ourselves, as we grope and feel after the departed, and as the lifeless but beautiful form of some dear friend lies before us as all that is now left of what was the richest and dearest treasure we had upon earth? Where is the spirit that was mine? What has become of the child that sat on my knee, that looked in my face, and in all whose movements and enjoyments I took such delight? How will this timid and

tender one share in the strange and thickly-peopled regions of heaven, the mother whispers to herself, as with breaking heart she kisses the cheek and closes the eyes of the babe that was hers? What gentle hand will guide it? What loving bosom will shelter it there? What has become of the wife that but recently adorned the home and rejoiced the heart of her husband? Where the husband that was the stay and support of the wife? What has become of all the multitudes of the past, the solemn echo of whose thoughts and deeds are still mingling with the common life of the world? Reason and nature are silent as regards such questions as these, and we must go to the Prophet of Galilee, to the incarnate Son of God, to be informed as to the future destiny of humanity, and to know what pure and holy homes above the dear and loving spirits of the departed are now occupying in a better world.

And if there be one thing more than another that should recommend that world to

us, that should make us strive after it over and above Christ's presence and the presence of dear departed friends, it is this, that there will be *no death* there. We could be content with a heaven with a sea in it, although the Bible tells us there will be no more sea, because it has often filled us with conceptions of God's power, and refreshed us with its invigorating breezes. And we could be content with a heaven with a night in it, although the Bible tells us "there will be no night there," because it is associated in our mind with some of life's happiest and choicest hours. But oh! a heaven with death in it! this would destroy all our conceptions of our heavenly Father's house, and ruin our happiness for ever. Recall to your minds, brethren, that memorable day or night in your history, when the joy of your heart and the delight of your eyes was about to be taken away—was fast sinking into the arms of death. Years have not obliterated the terrible memory of that hour from your mind. You struggled, and prayed,

and wept. You called on earthly helpers, and implored them to do their best; and when you saw that their help was vain, and the sweet spirit was fast going away to that world from which it would never return, you remembered former days, how you had loved and served God in the sanctuary, and what confidence and trust you had in Him then. You thought of Christ's power, promises, and love; and ideas of faith removing mountains, and dead ones coming to life again, passed through your minds as you agonised and prayed and wept. But no; the heavens were as brass, the earth was as iron. The peaceful calm of nature, or the still brilliancy of the midnight heavens, only seemed to mock your misery and laugh at your gloom; and the spirit—the life—the dear one passed away, and you stood beside the cold and speechless remains a beggared mourner in an empty world! This was death in all its awfulness; and therefore let it rejoice your hearts that, through the mercy of your God and the love and work

of your Saviour, such an image will never haunt you more when you reach the peaceful regions of heaven.

And, *finally*, as I feel assured that there are none whom I am this day addressing who do not believe that they have treasures in heaven, in addition to all that the glorious Godhead is and is providing, let me entreat you to *think often* of that blessed land. No doubt we must do our duty here. In this world of buying and selling, of loving and hating, of marrying and giving in marriage, of coarse toil and daily drudgery, we must often shut our hearts and wipe our tears, and nerve up our bodies for the daily task to which God in His providence calls us. Indeed, our first and paramount duty is to do our work well here; and no man can aim properly at heaven who is living a life of indolence upon earth. And, moreover, no excuse will suffice in the great day of the Lord for the neglect of duty here that is based upon the plea of merely thinking of or

musing on heaven. In this great world of suffering and want, where the hungry have to be fed, and the naked clothed, and the sick visited, and the young taught, and the wicked reformed, there is a solemn call upon all to be up and doing for God and for our fellow-men. But still, while all this is true, the influences of heaven and the spirit of heaven should be permeating our lives whilst its hopes should be cheering our hearts. If God has revealed to us the knowledge of this blessed world — if in characters of unmistakable and enduring brilliancy the Divine Being has traced throughout the pages of inspiration the glorious intelligence of a better scene, where patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and the good of former ages are enjoying undisturbed happiness, depend upon it there is a *design* in all this. And what other design, I ask, can there be but this—to give a heavenliness to our lives, to counteract the engrossing tendencies of our worldly business, to carry our thoughts and desires away forward over these hills of time to the

far-stretching scenes of eternity, and to show us that we have a real and permanent interest in the concerns of that blessed world? Let us then reciprocate the wise and merciful intentions of the Almighty, and ever remembering that Christ is the way to heaven, let us live near to Him, and our heaven will begin on earth; lights and glories from the upper sanctuary will surround and cheer our path here; the spirits of the glorified will beckon us onward, until at last the aspirations and longings of time are merged in the enduring affections of a happy eternity.

SERMON III.

Communion between the Living and the Dead.

MATT. XVII. 3.

"And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him."

ONE of the most impressive and remarkable instances of *communion* between the living and the dead was that which took place in the days of the Saviour on a mountain in Galilee. Long ages have passed by since then. Uncounted generations of men and women have come up upon this scene of things, and played their part and gone hence, since the earthly and the heavenly inhabitants held converse together upon Mount Tabor. But so important was the event

regarded, and so deeply did it impress the Christian mind then, and so greatly has it moved the Christian world since, that it is not only recorded by three of the inspired evangelists, but it forms, and has ever formed, one of the grand themes of devout contemplation and study. Our blessed Lord, in the exercise of His ministry upon earth, went up on one occasion to a mountain to pray—to engage in an act of devotion—an act of fellowship and communion with His Father in heaven ; and as He subsequently did when He went into the garden of Gethsemane, He took with Him His three most favoured apostles, Peter, James, and John. The Saviour's devotions had scarcely begun when He became robed in a garment of light, in a vesture of heaven's own brightness, and at once exercising that authority which belonged to Him as the Son of God and Sovereign of the universe, He summoned to His presence from their seats of bliss two of the most distinguished saints of Old Testament times. It was Moses and

Elias, and in the presence and sight and hearing of sinful men upon earth, the denizens of heaven conversed freely and openly with Jesus Christ in regard to a matter which concerned the temporal and eternal wellbeing of mankind. It was the death of Christ upon the cross; and as this great event would be the means of giving life, endless life, to bodily and spiritually dead millions, it was only fit that a foreshadowing of this should be exhibited on Tabor's Mount, when the living of the Saviour's day held fellowship and communion with some of the departed of bygone ages.

Nor was this the only occasion, even in the days of the Saviour, when there was such communion between the living and the dead. Another remarkable scene occurred in Bethany—that Bethany where Mary loved and Martha served, and Lazarus became sick, died, and was buried. The Divine Physician came to the tomb of the dead, and having with a word recalled the departed spirit and replaced it in its clay-cold tenement, He re-

stored the lost one to his once sorrowing but now happy home. Shortly after this, in token of gratitude to the great and compassionate Deliverer, a supper was made in Bethany—a feast highly suggestive of that sacrament of the Lord's Supper where believers on earth hold fellowship with Christ, and symbolical also of that marriage-supper of the Lamb in heaven, where the sainted dead of every age and nation shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. At that feast in Bethany, Martha and Mary, like ministering angels, waited on their Lord; whilst Lazarus, the once dead Lazarus, was one of those that sat at the table with Jesus and held communion with Him. And thus, during our Lord's brief ministry upon earth, not only did He again and again show His sympathy with bereaved friends—not only did He show His power over death and the grave—but He showed His love for communion with departed saints by recalling Moses and Elias from their thrones of glory, and Lazarus from the mys-

terious abysses of eternity, in order that he might hold fellowship and communion with them here. How true, then, was Jesus to the spirit and letter of His own beautiful prayer: "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me."

The other cases that will naturally suggest themselves in connection with this subject to every Christian mind, will be that of Samuel in the cave at Endor, coming up from the earth to denounce the iniquity and foretell the doom of Saul—the son of the widow of Zarephath restored again to life—the child of the Shunamite woman—the dead body that sprung to life again when it touched Elisha's grave—the daughter of Jarius—and the son of the widow of Nain, —all of them instances of the dead coming to life again, coming back from the chambers of death and holding loving communion once more with the living upon earth. But as if this were not enough in the history and

records of the Church to show the intimate connection between this world and the next, between time and eternity, and to quicken faith and hope, and inspire with comfort the hearts of sorrowing friends, the sacred narrative tells us of one who, while alive and active in the service of Christ here upon earth, was caught up to the third heavens to hold converse with the glorified ones that are there. For wise and good purposes, no doubt, silence was imposed upon Paul, so that he was not permitted to tell of the beauty and glory of the heavenly world, and of the happiness that those enjoy who are now privileged to dwell there. But still all these wonderful instances in the history of our holy religion of communion between the living and the dead, as well as the many revelations that were made to John in Patmos regarding heaven, are surely intended to remind us that our departed friends are alive and happy in another world, and to suggest to us that there may be ways and means still, now that the ages of miracle

have passed away, by which there may be frequent, profitable, and happy communion between the living and the dead.

And that such intercourse does go on there can be no doubt. Indeed no communion on earth is so touching and so impressive as this is. The heart of man is never so moved, never so vehement in its impulses and manifestations, as when in moments of bereavement and sorrow it speaks with those whose bodies are mouldering in the grave, but whose nobler part has gone to be with God. There may be, and there no doubt often is, a warmth and beauty of emotion in the hearts of Christians when, on the Lord's day and in the Lord's house, amid the impressive ordinances of devotion, the spirit is thrilled by the praises and prayers that are then rising like incense to heaven. But still, when the wounded spirit of the living in fresh and bitter moments of grief thinks of the dead, —when some relic, some memento, some old garment, for instance, or when some oft-frequented walk comes into view, and re-

minds it of the

> "vanished hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still,"

then it is not merely emotion, but an agony of emotion that possesses it; it is not merely an emptiness and internal craving, but an intensity of craving—a very desolation within—that makes the soul yearn for the departed, and shed tears and utter cries and lamentations more bitter than all the other wailings of woe.

And when is it that such intense and silent communion springs up between the living and the dead? Not, indeed, in our moments of happiness and joy—not in the playful and buoyant hours of life, or even when calm and contentment settles down upon the soul. No; but it is when death enters our homes and carries away the delight of our eyes and the joy of our hearts,—then, like the testament which the apostle speaks of as coming into force only after men are dead, so this new but active and vivid form of communion comes into operation

when all other modes of intercourse have ceased,—when all sensible fellowship has come to an end, and when sorrowing friends see, in the cold and speechless form that lies before them, the terrible evidences of a separation that is to be for ever in time. What can nature do now? What can unaided reason do? What can bodily strength do? What can any of the organs of sense do? Nothing. By the will and mandate of the Almighty a seal has been put upon these lips, a barrier has been erected, a strange gulf has been fixed between the living and the dead, which quenches all former modes of intercourse; and now other faculties of our nature have to be resorted to, other expedients have to be found out, other agencies have to be put in operation by sorrowing and desolate friends, so that the hallowed intercourse which was carried on, and which it may be long years had consecrated between the living and the living, may now be carried on between the living and the dead.

The question, then, naturally arises, How

is this to be done, when the conditions of life and intercourse are now not only so saddened but so changed—when the eye can no longer see the form nor the ear hear the voice of the departed one? How is there to be any communion between the living and the dead?

I. I answer, in the first place, *by putting into special exercise the faculty of memory.*

It is often the case that when one organ of the body or power of the mind suffers or becomes impaired, other organs and powers become more active and vigorous. This is the case with the faculty of memory as regards the dead. This faculty, as you all know, occupies an important place among the powers of the mind, and performs important functions in the economy of human life. While by the organs of sense we get perceptions of material things, and whilst by the conscience we are enabled to discriminate between right and wrong in our own conduct and in that of others around us, by the

faculty of memory we voluntarily and involuntarily recall the past, and give a present consciousness to all the sweet and hallowed intercourse of former years. Not only so, but it is by the exercise of this faculty, and not by any bodily sense, that we hold fellowship with Christ at a communion-table, and realise very vividly all the sayings and doings, all the love and compassion, of our departed Lord, and remember especially His suffering form and atoning death upon the cross. For according to His own loving command, uttered on that ever-memorable night, we are to do this in *remembrance* of Him.

Here, then, is a mode by which all the bereaved and sorrowing children of God upon earth may hold fellowship with their departed friends who are now with Christ in heaven. The organs of sense are, of course, of no avail now, but this valuable and spiritual faculty of the mind at once takes their place. For by it we can recall the departed at any time, and hold sweet and loving intercourse with them — in the house of God, on the

public highway, in the noisiest and busiest scenes of life—and that, too, just as vividly and impressively as when they walked by our side or sat with us in our formerly happy but now desolate homes. Nay; is it not the case that their absence from your sight has given them a larger place in your heart, and made a deeper mark upon your soul? Do you not think of them now more keenly and more frequently than when they were with you here upon the earth? Formerly it was very much a bodily and visible presence. Now it is a spiritual one. And just as the spiritual presence of Christ was said by Himself to be more expedient for His Church and people than a bodily one, so this spiritual intercourse between you and your dear departed friends, which memory creates and hallows, may be more blessed and important than all the other intercourse of former years. At all events you can now think of them by night and by day, and grief, alas! often forces you to do so. You can speak with them in your businesses and

homes; you can consider them in your resolutions and conduct,—how they would have acted, what they would have thought, how they would have looked. And thus, as we all expect to get grace and strength from Christ in that spiritual fellowship with Him at a communion-table, so may we expect to have our sorrows soothed and our hearts comforted and our lives made better by this frequent fellowship and communion with our beloved dead.

II. But another mode of communion between the living and the dead is that which is carried on under the influence and power of *love*.

And here we are brought to the consideration of one of the richest, sweetest, and most powerful of all the emotions of the human heart—an emotion that suggests to us not only the existence, but is redolent with the fragrance of heaven. For not only are we taught to believe that the grace of love shall exist throughout all eternity's long ages, but

that it is of the very essence of the Divine Being Himself. And not only so, but as if to mark His deep and intense interest in mankind, the Almighty has stamped this essential feature of His character upon every member of the human race; so that we have not merely before our eyes the warm and irrepressible love of youthful hearts, but the love of parents for children, and of children for parents—of husband for wife, and wife for husband—of brother for sister, and sister for brother—and friend for friend—and, over and above all, that infinite and incomprehensible love of God for sinners which showed itself in the incarnation, sufferings, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, brethren, death severs many ties, but it cannot break this one. It shuts the eye; it seals the lips; it silences the voice; it stops the beatings of the pulse; it covers the whole frame of the departed with a stiff, clayey, and often repulsive aspect. It removes from our sides, and from our homes, perhaps, the dearest objects we have upon

earth; but it does not, and it cannot, quench that flame of love that we believe exists in the soul of the departed—the spirit that has winged its way to the realms of bliss. Nor can it quench those other flames that exist in the hearts of those weeping and desolate ones that are left behind. That word of inspiration which informs us that faith and hope are to vanish from our souls the moment we enter the unseen world, assures us also that love is to exist and endure for ever. And from the very circumstance that we are then to be brought near to God—a God of love—we may depend upon it that this grace will continue to grow and strengthen within us as one of the brightest ornaments of our character, and one of the greatest sources of our everlasting peace.

Here, then, is a mode of fellowship that is ever carried on between the living and the dead—that of love; and that, too, at all times and in all circumstances—in solitude and in society, at home and abroad, in our waking moments and even during the dreamy

slumbers of the night. For you know, brethren, that love does not require for its exercise the presence of the beloved object. Where there is intensity of love the object of it is in the heart as well as in the world; and the mother may love her child as intensely, and even more intensely, now that that child is away from her home and a stranger in a strange land, just as much as when he was in her very presence. So is it with our beloved dead. Their absence from our sight and from our side has only quickened, intensified, and increased our affection for them and thoughts of them, and brought their forms and faces and words and actions nearer to us than they were before; so that although those dear ones may now be with God, treading the celestial mansions—away from the sins and sorrows of time, beautifying heaven's homes, and adorning with their voices the anthems of the redeemed—still may we walk with them in love, hold such spiritual intercourse with them as we do with Jesus at a com-

munion-table, and look forward to that future and wait for that glorious and endless day when we and they shall be together, and for ever with the Lord.

III. But another mode of communion between the living and the dead is that which is engendered by *hope*.

If the present scene of things was to be all that is allotted to man, varied and beautiful though it be, there would be nothing to hope for in the future, and no comfort in any of the anticipations of the human heart. For the present is bounded by the horizon of time, and all life's enterprises, enjoyments, and pleasures terminate at the grave. And whether it be youth suddenly arrested in its career of fame by the great destroyer, or manhood cut down in its prime, or old age feebly tottering to the narrow house, there would be little to comfort or sustain the soul in all its endeavours after happiness and peace and rest. But this is not the case. Inspiration reveals to us and

assures us of another and a brighter and more enduring scene of things. It lovingly meets the anxious aspirations and longings of the human soul, and tells us that for the spirit of the believer to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord,—tells us of another world where life shall never end, where death shall never enter, where friendships shall never be broken, and where sin and sorrow, and all the dark elements of woe and calamity, shall never again sadden the countenance or wound and lacerate the heart. The Almighty in His mercy and love has not merely assured us in His Word of a rescue through Christ from future woes, but He has depicted to us, by imagery the most choice and beautiful, the glory of our heavenly home; and many a Christian heart now, and many a weary pilgrim in former days, has been cheered by the visions which John saw in Patmos of a city that had no need of the sun or of the moon to lighten it, — a city whose streets are gold, whose gates are pearl, and all whose saints and

conquerors are now happy in their heavenly Father's house.

Here, then, is another element of our nature that begets and hallows communion between the living and the dead,—the hope of being together again, and together in circumstances that are free from all the cares and anxieties of time. It is no doubt true that it is the presence of Christ that will make heaven what it is to every believing heart. But it is no less true that that presence will be enhanced, and all heaven's enjoyments increased, by the presence there also of those who have contributed so much to our happiness and joy here upon the earth. And therefore this anticipation, and the conception of loving intercourse hereafter, is one of the hallowed modes of fellowship and communion between the living and the dead. For not only do we think, and think often, of our heavenly home now, but in doing so we associate it with the departed, and thus hold sweet fellowship with those we love and that we believe are already there.

And, indeed, many and varied are the thoughts that pass through the mind in these seasons of communion, when heaven with all its glories rises up before the mind, associated as it now is not merely with God and angels and archangels, seraphim and cherubim, but with the loving forms and faces of those we knew and loved so well upon earth, and whom we love still more now that they have gone from our side.

Although, therefore, our dear departed friends cannot now come to us, and look on us, and speak with us, as Moses and Elias came to and spake with Jesus in the hearing and presence of three great apostles of the Church, *still let us be thankful to God that all trace of them has not been obliterated from our minds*, but that through the organs and powers of that wonderful nature which the Almighty has given us, we can still hold fellowship and communion with them in a manner which, although sad and sorrowful, is yet soothing and comforting to

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the soul. We have not merely a bodily but a spiritual nature, each part of which has functions peculiar to itself; and although the bodily or sensible intercourse may have been for a while suspended by death, yet the spiritual remains, and even becomes more intense and vigorous than formerly it was, so that by the operations of memory, love, and hope, and the other manifestations of our spiritual nature, we can carry on an intercourse with our beloved dead which is known only to ourselves, and with which a stranger may not intermeddle. We do not need to *pray* for them as we formerly did when they were with us here in the conflict, and exposed to the temptations of a sinful world, because they have now entered into their rest, and are safely lodged, as we believe, in their heavenly Father's house. And neither do we need them to *pray* for us, because the voice of the great Intercessor is sufficient for that, and the "Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"

(Rom. viii. 26). But still we can associate with them in thought and feeling as we do with holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, and as we do with Jesus Himself at a communion-table and in the other ordinances of the Church; and we can do so all the more vividly and impressively because these dear departed ones were our companions here in former days, and have left deep and indelible marks upon our souls. Not only so, but the Word of God assures us that, as Christians even now in this imperfect and sinful state, we are already "come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to *the spirits of just men made perfect*" (Heb. xii. 22, 23); so that a fellowship—a spiritual fellowship—is already entered on, and one, moreover, which is to be continued and increased, and rendered productive of indescribable happi-

ness in the heavenly world throughout eternity's long and ceaseless ages.

Let us, then, ever bless God for that *element* of our being which *unites* us to our fellow-men while they are living, and which unites us still more tenderly and closely to those near and dear to us after they are gone. For although *solitude*—that so-called school of devotion and genius—has at times its advantages and privileges—although, as has been said,

> "There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
> There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
> There is society, where none intrudes,
> By the deep sea, and music in its roar"—

yet, as "no man liveth to *himself*, and no man dieth to *himself*," let us bless God for that wonderful, natural, and Christian tie which unites us and binds us to our race, —which makes us interest ourselves in the welfare and happiness of mankind here upon the earth, and which, when death interposes and makes separations that are strange and mysterious to our minds, yet enables us to

think of the departed, and to love the departed, and to follow the departed as they wend their way to their heavenly Father's house, and take their places among angels, archangels, seraphim and cherubim, in the regions of the blessed.

SERMON IV.

The Weeping Woman at the Saviour's Tomb.

JOHN xx. 15.

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?"

THIS is the first recorded utterance of the Saviour of the world after His resurrection from the grave—the first sound that proceeded from that blessed voice which, although it became silent upon the cross, is yet to reverberate with power and efficacy throughout all the dominions of death. The first utterance of the Almighty, when He created this vast universe and gave being to creatures and objects that formerly were not,

was this, "Let there be light"—and there was light. The Divine Being in His wisdom and goodness, standing amid the elements of primeval chaos, called for that which should dispel the prevailing darkness and give brightness and beauty to His own glorious creation. And now that same Divine Being, clothed in human form, long ages afterwards, standing in a world which had been darkened and desolated by sin, speaks from beside a tomb—His own tomb, there where He had vanquished death and brought life and immortality to light—in language that is well calculated to dispel the darkness of doubt and sorrow from every Christian heart. Shortly after man was created, as the inspired narrative tells us, death came into the world as a consequence of sin, as the penalty of transgression, and ever since the grave has been one of the commonest and saddest spots upon earth. How many, like Mary Magdalene, have stood and wept there! How many a precious gem of humanity has been carried

away from the comforts, warmth, and fellowship of earthly homes to be laid in that narrow house! How many bright and beautiful forms—forms that seemed to adorn the very earth upon which they trod, and for whose return to life again the costliest treasures would have been parted with—have been taken away all too soon, and deposited in these lowly beds! The grave, therefore, we naturally conclude, is the great place for weeping and tears. Mirth, revelry, levity, frivolity, and all suchlike manifestations of character, are out of place there. And yet here is one who came from heaven, who took upon Him our nature and died in our room—one who went down to the grave and deliberately and triumphantly came out of it again—and who now seems to question the propriety of this sorrow, by saying to this weeping woman, "Woman, why weepest thou?"

It may safely be asserted, therefore, that if these words had proceeded from the lips of any other than those of the Lord Jesus

Christ, or from those of the shining angels who were now illuminating with heavenly brightness Joseph's tomb, they would have been regarded as the language of mockery and insult. The heart of man and woman, and even child, often feels, and feels bitterly, that its dearest objects are in the grave. The thought of the sleepers there has often obtruded itself into the gayest and busiest scenes of life, and has even disturbed the silent watches of the night. The soldier on the battle-field, the mariner on the sea, the exile in a foreign land, the merchant on the mart of commerce, the statesman in his chamber, the monarch on the throne, —all have more or less at times been moved to tears as they thought of the dear ones who were now sleeping in silence in the grave. And therefore not merely at the sepulchre, but over this whole earth of ours, wherever human beings have been found, there also have been found those who were weeping for their dead. Even Jesus Himself—blessed be His holy name!—wept

at a mortal's grave. But now that same Saviour, having atoned for sin, having satisfied the claims of divine justice, having wrought out a perfect righteousness for His people, having vanquished death, and done that by His resurrection which would ensure the rising to life again—a life of perfect and endless happiness—of all the buried Christian dead, now seeks to give practical effect to His own great triumphs by speaking words that were not only calculated to soothe the heart of this sorrowing disciple, but to cheer the hearts of Christian mourners in every coming age, and to anticipate the time when God would wipe away all tears from His people's eyes.

I. The first thing, then, to be noticed in connection with this important interrogatory of Christ is the fact that *the words in question were addressed to a woman*, a pious woman — namely, Mary Magdalene. The great honour was put upon her, not only to be the first to hear the voice, but to

behold the resurrection form of the ever-blessed Redeemer. And not only so, but she was privileged on the morning of that first Sabbath of the Christian Church to see the forms and to hear the voices of angels who had been commissioned from heaven to do honour to the Saviour at His now empty tomb.

And this perhaps cannot be regarded as anything strange or unusual in the history of the Church; for the Word of God contains many beautiful and striking examples of female piety and devotion. The Old and New Testament Scriptures abound with the names of women, the sound of which are familiar to all Christians — women whose recorded piety and worth are well calculated, even at this day, to give an impulse to all the higher and nobler feelings of the human heart. The Old Testament Church had its Miriams, its Sarahs, its Rebekahs, its Rachels, its Hannahs, its Ruths, and Esthers, and such-like—matrons, maidens, and widows who, in ages of religion and irreligion, of idolatry and

superstition, showed a purity of life and a fervour of devotion which will for ever command the admiration of all God-fearing ones. And the New Testament Church is, if possible, richer still. For it has its Marthas and Marys, its Salomes and Priscillas, its Dorcases and Phœbes, and many others,—women who, even in the days of the Saviour, and by the side of apostles, drew down upon themselves the commendation of heaven. And coming down to the later ages of the Christian Church, the ages of pagan persecution, history informs us of many young and beautiful maidens who surrendered their lives rather than deny and disown their Saviour, and whose courage, fortitude, and endurance are among the most cherished memories of the Christian Church. If at the opening of the sacred narrative and the dawn of human life woman drew down upon herself the frown of heaven and the punishment of the Almighty, because of her priority in the great transgression—because of her too ready compliance with the suggestions

of the evil one—the subsequent history of the Church proves to us that she has more than redeemed her character; for it shows us her peculiar share in the incarnation—her forwardness in acts of piety, her devotion to the Saviour of the world, and the steadfastness of her faith, and the strength and constancy of her affection, even when iniquity was abounding and the love of many was waxing cold.

Perhaps it is the case that there is something in the religion of Jesus Christ that is peculiarly suited to the female character—something with which the higher and nobler instincts of that nature is singularly in affinity. For that religion is not merely a religion of profession and confession, a religion of self-denial and meekness, of gentleness, temperance, and patience, of faith, hope, and suchlike, but it is a religion of *love;* and love is or ought to be one of the strongest and most predominant impulses of the female heart. Coarseness, vulgarity, brutality, cruelty, and all such reprehen-

sible features of character, are either softened or subdued when they are brought under the influence of Christian teaching and placed side by side with the doctrines, precepts, and rites of Christianity. And hence it is that the gentler and softer qualities of women seem to be more at home under Christian influences and Christian teaching, and that in the history of the Church women have always stood prominently forward in the ranks of the faithful, and that God has signally honoured them as instruments for good in the earthly kingdom of the ever-blessed Redeemer. It was so with Mary Magdalene. She was the first to witness and to welcome from the grave the great Conqueror of death. She was the first to see and hold converse with Him who was soon to occupy heaven's loftiest throne; and sinner though she may have been—hated, it may be, and despised by men—she was now honoured by Christ to be His messenger to holy apostles, and to be the blessed medium through which the

first rays of hope and consolation came to mankind from the Saviour's empty tomb.

II. Nor should we fail to notice as an important element in this interesting scene the *motive* which animated Mary in coming so early to the Saviour's tomb on the morning of this ever memorable and hallowed day; because *motive* occupies an important place in religion, and indeed in all the actions of human life: for it tends to give a value to, or to deprive of value as far as regards morality, all we think and say and do. Not only so, but motive lies at the root of all virtuous and vicious actions. What, then, was Mary's motive in making this early visit to the Saviour's tomb? It was *love to Christ.* Piety dwelt down deep in her heart, and love made her anxious once more to behold the grave, and if possible to honour the blessed form of her Saviour. But what will not love do, especially Christian love—that richest product of the Holy Ghost—that holy and sanctified grace that comes to

the soul from the very throne of God? It will make the night sleepless by the earnestness of its prayers and the melody of its songs. It will sever ties that have formerly bound heart to heart and friend to friend, if impiety or irreligion or infidelity intervene. It will make hardships feel light, and the most tremendous sacrifices be easily borne. It will give an ardour to the mind, and a fervour to the soul which will sustain and strengthen it in the darkest hours of doubt and grief. "My Lord and my God!" said the once incredulous but now believing Thomas as he caught a glimpse of the pierced hands and side of his divine Master. "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee," said the erring but now penitent Peter by the Lake of Galilee. And Paul too, that earnest, faithful, and self-denying apostle, he who could have climbed to the loftiest pinnacle of earthly fame, declared at a time when Christianity stood, as it were, naked and bare in the world, without influence, without

friends, without fashion on its side, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Nor does it alter in the least degree our attachment to our divine Master, or the intensity of that attachment, our ignorance of the condition and circumstances of the beloved one. How ignorant are we all in this world of the glory that now surrounds Him who was once "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" here upon the earth! Into those hidden regions of glory and peace our souls cannot penetrate to behold the happiness of the redeemed, and to witness the triumphs of a once crucified Lord. And yet who will say that this circumstance in any way diminishes our attachment to Christ? Oh no. Be He on a cross or on a throne; be He sleeping in silence in Joseph's tomb, or walking in majesty and power through the cities and towns of Palestine; be He sitting in the house of the publican, or shining in glory on Tabor's

Mount,—it is all the same to the heart of the true disciple. Do we think less of our friend—does our attachment to him diminish because he is not in the same spot and circumstances to-day that he was yesterday? No. Although weeks and months and years may have passed by, and he may now be away in a foreign land, fighting on some bloody battle-field or sailing some dangerous sea,—although the eye cannot see the form nor the ear catch the accents of the voice, this makes no change in the workings of affection, or in the outgoings of the loving heart. Not even death itself, with all its chilling horrors, or the grave, with its silence, coldness, corruption, and gloom, can quench the flame of love or stop the warm beatings of the loving heart. For that heart will seek to follow the dear one into the abysses of eternity, and to go with it through regions that are both unrevealed and unknown.

So was it with Mary Magdalene and Christ. She loved Him living, and she loved Him now when she believed He was

dead. She had seen Him pale and bloody upon Calvary's cross—all power gone from His arm, lustre from His eye, speech from His lips, and life from His frame. She had seen Him shrouded in the pale garments of death and laid in the grave, and yet she loved Him still. And so when the morning of the third day dawned, she is found wandering about the sepulchre, and disturbing the prevailing stillness by the plaintiveness of her cry, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." And thus does this humble and pious woman read a lesson to the Christian world throughout all time as to what men's aims and motives ought to be in religion. Not worldly profit or pleasure or ease; not the base and mean expedients of the world; not fashion or avarice, or vanity or worldly aggrandisement; but a sincere love to Christ—a love that shall make us willingly endure sacrifices for Him, that shall make us welcome the Sabbath when it comes round, and cause our hearts to swell with emotion when

it is said unto us, Let us go into the house of the Lord, and that, amid all the varied and impressive ordinances of the sanctuary, make us seek for Jesus as Mary sought for Him at Joseph's tomb.

III. And depend upon it, that if thus we love and seek for Christ—"seek the Lord," as the Scripture has it, "while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near,"—if we take up this noble attitude as followers of the Lamb, a great and glorious *reward* will be ours in time and in eternity. In this world of sin and sorrow, of care and anxiety, of vicissitude and change, of disappointments, bereavements, and broken hearts, we should all of us endeavour to hear and appropriate to ourselves the consolation embodied in our Lord's words, "Why weepest thou?" "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." "All things are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." "Why weepest thou?" the Saviour is still

saying to every sorrowing one. The sins for which you mourn are forgiven; the enemies you dread are vanquished; the inheritance you long for is secured; the prize you covet is won, and the frown has now gone from the face of God, and all heaven's gates are now open, and its joyous hosts are waiting to receive and welcome you there. "Why weepest thou?" The child for whom you mourn is in bliss; the friend you have lost is safe in his or her heavenly Father's house—every tear now gone from the eye, every sorrow from the heart, the crown encircling the brow, the palm waving in the hand, and the song of the redeemed issuing from the lips. Oh! this soothing interrogatory of the triumphant Saviour, which has come down to us through all these bygone ages, should be written on all our hearts and remembered in all our homes; it should be inscribed, as if in letters of gold, on all the sanctuaries and places of devotion of our sorrowing world — wherever, indeed, men sin, wherever men suffer — wherever they

weep for the dead, or for losses and crosses—in the houses of affliction, and among the tombs and sepulchres of the dead; for unquestionably these words of the Lord Jesus are words of comfort and hope, assuring us that sin has been atoned for, that death has been vanquished, that the grave shall yet be stripped of all its spoils, and that above and beyond this sublunary scene there is a home awaiting us where no sorrow shall ever darken our countenance, and no pain ever grieve our heart. In God's presence there is fulness of joy, and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

SERMON V.

Resignation to the Divine Will.

JOHN XVIII. 11.

"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

THE great lesson which these words, and the ever-memorable scene which preceded their utterance, is intended to teach the Church, and indeed the world, is that of perfect resignation to the will of God. Jesus in Gethsemane—come to that very place where His enemies would lay hold of Him, and where was to begin the dreadful drama of His last sufferings—presents to us a perfect *example* of a resigned, submissive, and obedient spirit, and that too at a time

when, although in apparent weakness, He was yet, as the incident shows us, in full possession of superhuman power. And the very intensity of the agony which He there endured—the depth of that consciousness of sorrow that He there experienced—only renders the example all the more perfect and striking in the eyes of His Church. Never indeed was there a time in the earthly history of our blessed Lord in which His will did not beat in unison with the divine will—in which His spirit did not breathe in harmony with God's spirit—in which the beloved Son on earth did not honour the Father's law and respect His authority. But now when the appointed and anticipated "hour" was approaching, and the great and inexpressible sufferings were to be endured—now when the great purpose of the incarnation was to be achieved, and the terrible load of a world's guilt was to be laid upon Christ—now when the sword, not of human but of divine justice, was to be unsheathed, that it might smite the shepherd,

—who does not wonder at and admire the yielding and submissive spirit of this "Lamb of God," this Beloved of the Father! Even these last and greatest of all trials, as all others had been, will be endured by Christ,—that scourging, that mockery, that desertion by God and man, that ignominy, that cruel death of the cross, that inconceivable and inexpressible vengeance of heaven on account of sin,—all will be borne by Christ without a murmur or complaint. "If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

And herein, at the close of that pure and spotless life, and out of one of the most mysterious and touching scenes of His history, does our blessed Lord set before His Church and people a lesson from which the divine spirit wishes us all to learn—namely, that of perfect resignation to the will of God. For it cannot be that that great scene of agony which preceded and referred to the crucifixion

is to have no influence on the individual life of the believer, more especially when it is so well fitted both to instruct and impress the mind. It cannot be that this great internal struggle of the mighty sufferer on this last night of His humiliation is intended only to be looked at with the eye of wonder and amazement, and to have no reflex influence on the suffering children of God. No; besides its importance as an experience in the earthly life of the Son of God, it has also its uses and designs as a never-to-be-forgotten *lesson* to mankind. Our blessed Lord, having through His whole life instructed the people in the sublime doctrines of the Gospel, teaching them the blessedness of sorrow, of meekness, of persecution, and suchlike, and having shortly before this given His disciples an example of humility by washing His disciples' feet, He now enters Gethsemane's garden, and gives to them, and to the whole world of mankind in every subsequent age, an example of resignation to the will of God. And who does not admire the sublime grandeur

of this scene?—the solitary Saviour meekly and perseveringly enduring His great trials to save a lost world! Jesus, as our friend and Saviour, does not stand aloof from suffering. He does not bid His people go into furnaces of trial, and scenes of persecution and sorrow, from which He Himself recoils. No; the great Captain of our salvation enters willingly the darkest places of sorrow—penetrates, indeed, into regions of calamity where no earthly foot can follow Him; and thus does He stamp upon the holy and self-denying precepts of the Gospel the indelible marks of His own example. He who bade men be holy was Himself holy; He who counselled to forgiveness and gentleness was Himself gentle and forgiving; He who preached humility to men was Himself humble; He who encouraged men to patience and resignation under the hand of God was Himself patient and resigned—trod the path which He would have others tread, and thus marked out a pathway for His people which, although in some places rough and thorny,

like His own thorny crown, would yet in the end lead to glory, honour, and immortality. There is not a sufferer in the great family of Adam who could reach the depths to which Jesus went; there is not a face that was ever marred like His; there is not a soul that was ever pierced as His soul was. And whilst the consciousness of this should ever be present to the believer, he should also feel that the great example of resignation which accompanied it all is a motive and stimulus to him to seek grace from God, that, amid the varied and constantly recurring trials of life, he may be able to imitate so grand an example, and yield unmurmuring obedience to the will of heaven.

Now, in order that this may be correctly and intelligently done, let me, with the help of the Holy Spirit, first of all explain to you *the nature of this heavenly grace.*

The grace of resignation which our blessed Lord exhibited in Gethsemane's garden—first of all in His agony in solitude, and

then when His enemies came to apprehend Him—is commonly known in the language of the schools as one of the passive virtues, and as such it consists in exhibiting a certain calm frame of mind under existing or anticipated providences, more especially when these providences are severe. It is not like justice or veracity, or self-love or charity, an active principle of the mind, impelling us to *do* something either for our own good or the good of others; but it is a state of mind awakened within us by events which have happened to us, and over which we may have had no control. Resignation does not drive a man to action. It controls him when he is acted on. It is not a motive-power to some course of conduct which we may have entered upon either for our own good or that of our fellow-men. On the contrary, it is that state of mind we manifest when things have happened to us—the sweet and chastened spirit we exhibit when the mysterious providences of heaven are falling thick and fast upon the soul—

and therefore like patience, it is a passive virtue—a grace that can have little or no existence at all in times of mere reverie or contemplation, but which derives its existence and strength from the severe and mysterious dealings of God.

It is generally taken for granted that this grace can only exist in times of trial—when, for instance, God is chastising us, bereaving us, thinning our little circles, emptying our homes, carrying away those whom we love to the cold and narrow grave—or when we are ourselves under affliction, or threatened with all-devouring death. And no doubt it is the case that it is in times of trial that this grace flourishes most. But there may be resignation shown also in times of prosperity and health, just as well as in times of trial and adversity—when, for instance, men's opinions, ideas, notions, and doings run counter to the opinions, ideas, and notions of God, whose ways the Bible tells us are not as man's ways, and whose thoughts are not as man's thoughts. And therefore since men

may mentally resist God in prosperity as well as in adversity, acquiescence or the absence of resistance to the thoughts and ways of God is simply resignation. For it is a constant saying of the heart to God, as Jesus has taught us to say, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." It is a freedom from all discontentment and murmuring with our own lot in life, and a freedom, moreover, from envy, jealousy, or grudging at the lot of others. And therefore in all conceivable states of existence, whether prosperous or adverse—whether we are at home or abroad, in health or sickness, in sorrow or joy—whether we are engaged in the active duties of life or sitting listlessly by our firesides,—in all the possible spheres and positions of our ordinary and common life upon earth, we may show the spirit of resignation or its opposite to the will, mandates, decrees, and doings of our heavenly Father.

Nevertheless it is in times of trial that the grace of resignation or the want of it is seen most conspicuously in the lives and

conduct of men. It is when the darkness settles down upon the soul, which is to issue in some terrible disaster, or when the blow has already fallen on the heart, that discovers to us the loveliness of this grace, or that shows us the truly pitiable condition of the man who has it not. Like the glow-worm's light, which appears only in the thick darkness, or like the "stars that gild the canopy of night," and whose brilliancy can only be seen when the world around is robed in gloom; so the grace of resignation appears in all its loveliness when the night of sorrow has fallen upon the soul—when the home that was once full is now empty—when the voice that once spoke to us in tones of love speaks no more—when stretched upon the cold bed or sleeping in the cold grave lies the lifeless form of him or her we love, and whose death has made home so empty, and the world so desolate, and the soul so dark. Then it is in that dark hour, when God seems to have forsaken us, that the beauty of resignation is seen in yielding a

calm and chastened acquiescence to the will of heaven.

And think not that the soul that is thus resigned and submissive *is callous or insensible* to the terrible calamity that may have befallen it, or that this acquiescence arises from a heartless and hardened indifference to trial. No; far from it. The heart feels the severity of the blow that has come upon it, but it accepts it as the will of heaven. It is pained and grieved at the disaster that has befallen it; but then God has done it. It is seen to be the designed and premeditated action of infinite mercy, wisdom, and love. It is acknowledged as the arrangement of One above whom the believer loves, honours, fears, and trusts; and therefore although the trial be greater than was ever experienced before, rending hearts that were formerly one, and causing survivors to weep and lament, yet the childlike obedience of faith rises high above all internal emotion, and the Christian spirit of the sufferer breathes forth the

sentiment of the Saviour—"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" It was thus that Job felt and acted when he was bereft of all—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." It was thus, too, that David carried his spirit when the child of Bathsheba was no more; and in many a home since—in the homes of princes and peasants alike, when the dark shadow of death has rested upon them, and dear ones have been snatched away by the great destroyer—the hearts of young and old alike, torn and lacerated like some striking object of beauty which rude hands have despoiled, have yet been able to manifest the Christian spirit of resignation, and to say, "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

And the *reasonableness and propriety* of such an attitude as this on the part of the followers of Christ, under the wise and chastening hand of God, cannot be questioned. For surely it becomes every finite

and dependent creature, whether angel or man, to yield his will to the will of God—to accept with meekness whatever providences He sends—to regard the world as God's world, and under His constant care—to see His hand in every providence and His mercy in every lot—to recognise and realise His presence wherever we go; and even when trial comes and God covers our dwelling with a cloud, shutting us up, as it were, in darkness, and separating us from the joys and pleasures of former days,—even then it becomes us, as followers of a suffering Saviour, to endeavour to say, "If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

And mark *the blessedness, the heavenliness* of such a frame of mind as this—such subjection and resignation to the Mind that rules and the Hand that guides all the movements of this great and mysterious universe, more especially when all our surroundings here are those of change, vicissi-

tude, and decay. With what fears and misgivings do worldly and wicked men often anticipate a dying day! With what blank amazement and horror do they stand before the adverse providences of heaven! Who can describe the state of that mind that is called upon to endure bereavement without being able to acquiesce in it, or to see by faith the happy home to which the departed spirit has gone? When the beloved child of some great ungodly one is taken away by death,—one in whom all his hopes were centred, on whom all his love was lavished —one who was the delight of his eyes and the joy of his heart, and whose presence made home so happy and the world so full, —when such a one is taken away, who can describe the horror, the anguish, the blank despair of the mourner as he emerges from his home with the lifeless dust, fretting, fuming, repining, murmuring, and complaining, and yet confessing his powerlessness and helplessness in the presence of the great destroyer, death? With no trust in God,

no faith in the Saviour, no glowing anticipation of the heavenly mansions, what a dreary and desolate condition must that man be in as he thinks of the ruin that has come upon him, and the degradation and corruption of the grave, where he must lay the wasting form of his dead! How different the condition of the resigned and submissive spirit —the true and sincere child of God! There all is peace, rest, and contentment—the hope of heaven and the blessedness of heaven blending with the sorrows of the tomb; and ever and anon the bright anticipation rising up in the mind that a day is assuredly coming when separations shall cease, when long-absent friends shall meet again, and when the sorrows and trials of earth shall give place to the eternal and unbroken felicities of heaven.

And thus it is that while the ungodly man is in bewilderment often and despair under the mysterious providences of heaven, the child of God takes a favourable view of all. He believes what the apostle says, that "all

things *work together* for good to them that love God." Temptation—that is for good; poverty—that is for good; affliction—that is for good; bereavement — that is for good; death — that is for good. The believer knows, because the Bible tells him so, that God, by the power of the cross, is preparing a people for Himself—gathering His own dear ones out of this sinful world —in order that He may transplant them in the paradise above,—set them down on the golden streets, and in the very midst of heaven's brightest throngs. And just as the keeper of a garden goes through it all, watching every flower, plant, and shrub, nursing one here, watering another there, cutting off the withered branch that is interfering with the life and health and growth of some favourite plant,— so does God go through His vineyard of souls here upon the earth, visiting them with the varied providences of life that He sees to be necessary for their good, in order that He may fit and prepare them for the glori-

ous homes above. And the believer, knowing this, acquiesces in his heavenly Father's will —in the will of Him who does all things wisely and well.

This is resignation. This is the great lesson of Gethsemane. Have we learned it? Have you and I learned it? The great school for such instruction is the divine footstool. In order, therefore, that this grace which shone so conspicuously in Christ may adorn and beautify our lives, let us ask it from God in prayer—from that great Being from whom proceedeth every good and perfect gift. Let us not merely ask comfort under trial, but let us ask grace to bear it; and let us do so in no doubting or hesitating manner, but let us do it in faith, asking earnestly, seeking eagerly, knocking loudly at the door of heaven. "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

SERMON VI.

The Great Comforter.

REV. VII. 17.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

THIS precious fragment of divine truth is connected with a passage that has ever been regarded as one of the most sublime and comforting in the Word of God. It is the vision of a suffering but redeemed world at the moment of its complete and perfect emancipation. The inspired writer here depicts to us, in language the most beautiful and tender, the Almighty Himself—the Maker and Preserver of every suffering and sorrowing one—the Being whose sovereign

power has often been resisted by man—whose wise arrangements have often been frustrated in the gracious act of *wiping away tears*. The mind of the beholder, in perusing this whole passage, is called on to contemplate a scene not only of great glory and happiness, but one of infinite sympathy and condescension. It is drawn away, as it were, from the sinless inhabitants of heaven —from the seraphim and cherubim of the upper sanctuary—away from heaven's golden streets and radiant homes—away from its walls of jasper and gates of pearl, from its ceaseless songs and uninterrupted enjoyments,— to behold humanity — sinful but redeemed humanity—all dripping with sorrow, now come to the Being, and the only Being, who can and will take it all away. It is paradise once lost, and more than paradise regained. It is communion with God now restored. It is sin and all its dark and deadly consequences removed. It is an angry, an offended God, now reconciled — a tender and loving Father,

receiving back into His glorious abodes a multitude which no man can number; and now there is, as it were, music and dancing, feasting and rejoicing, endless happiness and peace in the pure and saintly homes of heaven.

But all this suggests to us not merely an antecedent epoch of sorrow, but the mighty work of God's Son in removing and destroying its cause. As we behold the happy family of fallen humanity, now at peace and rest in the heavenly mansions, hungering no more and thirsting no more, it is impossible not to think of the long ages of agony and mystery through which it has passed, and the wide sphere it has occupied in the dominions of the Almighty. The procession of mankind from the gates of an earthly paradise, on to the time when, at God's word, this sinful world shall be burned up—however much it may redound to the divine glory—is to the short-sighted vision of man one of indescribable woe. These battle-fields of slaughter — these contentions of short-

lived men, these countless hosts of youth passing on hurriedly to premature graves, these unsatisfied cravings, unrealised efforts, endless disappointments, intermittent pains of body and mind—reveal to us one long dark scene of distress which no finite mind can grasp; and were it not for the clear and unmistakable intimations of revelation, the sustaining grace of God's spirit, the hopes of the Gospel, the advent of God's Son, not as a radiant angel but as a man of sorrows, the mind would sink under the contemplation, and give way to the darkness of despair. In redeeming and saving a lost world, the blessed Saviour came down to our dark and sinful abodes. He assumed humanity's saddest, and more than saddest, aspect; and while He has died for our sins and taken away their guilt and impurity, He has taught us this salutary lesson, that trial is the pathway to glory, that sanctified tribulation is the precursor of heaven's happiness, and that those who have washed their robes and made them white in the

blood of the Lamb shall yet stand in God's very presence, and before His throne, and have every tear wiped away, every indication of sorrow removed by God Himself.

The aspect, then, in which the text presents Jehovah to us is one of a most winning and attractive, one of a most remarkable and extraordinary, description. It is one of the purposes of revelation not merely to reveal God's will to us, but to reveal God Himself, in so far as language can describe, and the mind—the finite mind—can conceive of the Eternal One. And yet how cautiously and tremblingly does the pen of inspiration attempt to describe to us our Maker, and the world's Maker, and God! It is by negatives and concealments almost, rather than by disclosures. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him." "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find Him out." "He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies." And when in olden times God did come down to tabernacle with

men, He was robed in the majesty of clouds, which were as the dust of His feet. It was with a cloud that He guided the church in the wilderness. It was a cloud which filled the tabernacle of old. It was in a cloud that God spake by the Jordan and on Mount Tabor. And therefore by these mystic symbols of concealment we are made to think of God. But here in this text God is presented to us in the most positive manner as the great Comforter of His sorrowing children, as the God of all consolation and grace. Not merely has He provided that Lamb — His own Son—in whose blood the robes of the redeemed are made white; not merely does He permit sinful dust and ashes to stand before His throne; not merely does He allow redeemed humanity to serve Him day and night in His temple; not merely does He dwell among them, so that they shall hunger and thirst no more,—but He comes forth in a personal capacity into their very presence, and wipes away all tears from their eyes.

And this aspect—this compassionate aspect

—of the Almighty, so tender and beneficent in itself, and so beneficial to man, is, we must never forget, one that was made clearly known to us by our blessed Lord. For when He, as the second person of the Godhead, as God incarnate, was about to finish His work and go away, He announced to the sorrowing disciples that God would come to them Himself, and God would abide with them as their Comforter. And, indeed, this is one of the most prominent aspects in which we are to view, contemplate, and think of God now—namely, as our Comforter. When we look at nature around us, in all its grandeur and majesty, as a manifestation of God, we think of God's power. When we see the order with which everything is arranged in the heavens above and the earth beneath, we think of His wisdom. When we think of the light and the heat and the productiveness of the soil, we think of His goodness. When we look at the cross, and see Jesus there dying for us, for our sins, we think of God's love. But when, in addition

to all this, the Saviour and the Bible present to us God as our Comforter—our Comforter in time, our Comforter in eternity—we are amazed at the infinite condescension of the Divine Being. And therefore when sorrow falls on us—when the world disquiets and annoys us — when poverty, affliction, or bereavement, or all combined, sadden our countenances and darken our souls — oh, then, let us remember and believe in this gracious character of God, that He, and not man, is His people's Comforter, as He is their Saviour, and that while He ministers to our wants and provides for our every necessity, He will wipe away our tears now, and *all* tears when we come into His adorable presence at last!

And it is interesting to notice the very expressive symbol of sorrow which the Divine Spirit here seizes upon to depict to us the common grief of humanity, and under which God comforts us,—it is that of tears. Indeed, one of the commonest and readiest ways in which agony or grief of mind is expressed

by physical parts to the outer world of mankind, is that of weeping. The eye, which is one of the most useful, beautiful, and honoured organs of the human body, instantly and touchingly shows its sympathy with the sorrows of the soul by opening its sluices, its flood-gates of tears. When sin has been committed secretly or openly, and when the soul mourns bitterly for transgression for what has been done — or when God has prostrated us on a bed of sickness or one of death—or when the last enemy has come, and all unwelcome and unbidden has mercilessly taken away the friend whom we love, and when our inner nature is shaken and torn with grief by the weight and magnitude of the blow,—then the eye fills with tears, disclosing to us the greatness and severity of the trial. So Joseph wept when, amid the grandeur of Pharaoh's house, he thought of the unkindness of former days, and made himself known to his brethren; so David wept for his beloved Absalom; so Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, and

over the impenitence of Jerusalem; so Peter wept when the Lord looked upon him in the judgment-hall; and so Paul wept at the enemies of the cross of Christ. And when the redeemed from among men shall enter at last their heavenly Father's house, not only will God make them perfectly holy but He will make them perfectly happy, for He will wipe away ALL tears from their eyes.

And it will enhance our conceptions of the aspect in which the Almighty here presents Himself to us, if we remember that this is a much-coveted, much-desired blessing on the part of fallen man — namely, comfort. It may not be possible for us, for any one, to escape trial; but it is possible to expect and receive comfort under it. Just as the weak and unprotected in the moment of danger fly for refuge and help to the arms of the strong, so the sorrowing of all lands seek comfort and consolation under sorrow. It may be in retirement and seclusion from the world and all its ways, or it

may be in excitement and pleasure, or in new scenes and circumstances, or in the exercises of religion and the pious words of godly counsellors, or in any of the varied expedients which the mind itself may conjure up; but all seek comfort under sorrow. The lonely heart must find some friendly bosom on which to rest. The saddened countenance must have cheerful words spoken to it. As the hungry man needs food and the thirsty one drink—as the sinner seeks pardon and the wearied pilgrim seeks rest,—so the sorrowing soul seeks comfort under all its woes; and therefore it is cheering to think that the Almighty Himself, amid all the manifestations of His power and wisdom, of His love and goodness to us, comes forth also in this compassionate aspect—namely, that of a Comforter, by wiping away all tears from weeping eyes.

But still this perfectly happy aspect of humanity spoken of in the text must be regarded by us rather as a prophecy of the future than an experience of the present.

The tearless eye as well as the sorrowless heart will never be seen on this side the grave. In this respect we have to follow our sorrowing Lord. It is trial now, and perfect happiness hereafter. For sin will ever do its deadly work upon the frail nature of man as long as it is permitted to reign; and as that reign is to be coeval with the existence of man on earth and in time, so it can only be in eternity that the bright and joyous faces of the redeemed are to be seen in all their beauty and unstained purity. For it is not merely tears, but all tears, that God is to wipe away; so that never more shall one run down the cheek as an evidence of the sorrow that is paining the heart within. Since, therefore, such a consummation cannot be experienced in time, we are naturally forced to the conclusion that it is in the paradise above, where there is the river and the tree of life, and no more curse; in the city whose streets are gold and whose gates are pearl; in that blessed abode of which the Lord God and the Lamb are the light,—it is there, and

there alone, that this sublime vision will be fully and perfectly realised.

In the meantime, then, let this beautiful aspect of the Almighty, which is here presented to us, draw out our affection to Him, and heighten our conception of the tenderness, love, and gentleness of His nature. And when at any time, amid the storms and trials of life, we are concerned about our future welfare and happiness, or about the welfare and happiness of those who have gone before us into the eternal world, let us rejoice at the thought that that great Being, from whose face hereafter the earth and the heavens are to flee away and no place be found for them, is at the same time the very One who is to be our best and dearest friend, and to wipe away all tears from our eyes.

SERMON VII.

The Orphan's Friend.

PSALM xxvii. 10.

"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

THIS is an expression of confidence in God, coming to us from a former dispensation of the Church, and referring to a period of sorrow caused by bitter bereavement. The inspired writer—he who on a previous occasion declared that he would "fear no evil" when he went "through the valley of the shadow of death"—now declares his implicit confidence in God when his home should be empty, and the parents who begat him were slumbering in their graves. It is a time,

therefore, not only of great sorrow, but also of great loneliness and solitariness to which the Psalmist looks forward,—a time suggestive of the looseness of the dearest earthly ties, and of the instability of all human friendships. There are no names more dear to us than that of father and mother, no relationship closer than that of parent and child; and yet in God's good time the parents may be taken away by death, and the solitary and deserted children left as orphans in the world. It is such a possibility as this that the Psalmist contemplated in his own experience when he gave utterance to the words of our text—and he at once goes from earth to heaven, from the seen and temporal to the unseen and the eternal. He does not linger among the frail and broken friendships of time in order to stay his soul, but he hastens away, past angel and archangel, to that God who is His people's refuge and strength in all generations, and whom all true and loving children recognise as their Father in heaven. "It is better," says this

same inspired writer on one occasion, "to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man: it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." And now, when he thinks that the parents who begat him may in the providence of God be called upon to leave him—now, when the most tender and surest of all earthly props seems about to give way, he lifts his eyes to the heavens and exclaims, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

Now this text brings very vividly before us not the sinfulness, or the frailty, or the mortality, or the vanity of man, but the dependence of man. And I need scarcely say that this dependence is in many ways evidenced in the experience of all who belong to our race. Notwithstanding the dignity to which God has raised man, making him lord of this fair universe; and notwithstanding the many rich and varied gifts with which he is endowed, yet, like every object and creature in the universe, he is dependent on others, and dependent most of all upon

God. There are no doubt some creatures and things in this mysterious scene more helpless and dependent than others. The infant, for instance, in the arms of its mother; the child who as yet is only developing its bodily, mental, and moral powers; the young, indeed, almost of all creatures; and those clinging plants in the vegetable world which grow only to perfection when they have some prop or stay on which to lean, and which, when they find no proper stay, will cling to some wretched weed,—all show that in a universe of dependent objects and creatures, some are more helpless and dependent than others. Indeed, notwithstanding the pride and vaunting characteristics of the human heart, and those boasting and confident propensities of unsanctified humanity, the more we look abroad over the world, and the keener our scrutiny of men and things, the more does the conclusion force itself upon the mind that there is no independence, and no independent Being anywhere but God. For not only does this

world of ours hang ever on His unaided arm, but all worlds do so, and all beings, all creatures, and objects. The inhabitants of heaven and earth—the seraphim and cherubim, the angels and archangels of the upper sanctuary, as well as frail and mortal men here below,—all have a derivative and dependent existence; an existence and a framework devised and planned by God, and supported and sustained by Him, and by Him alone.

But there are subordinate helps ordained by God in the various relationships of life; and the Psalmist here refers to the surest and most stable of these—namely, parents in their relationship to their children, and the help the one gives to the other. The first friends of the infant babe in its entrance upon a scene of mingled joy and sorrow, suffering and happiness, are its parents. It is in their home that it finds its first shelter —its first school. It is by them it is reared, instructed, guided, and protected, before it emerges forth to do the duties and endure

the trials of life, and suffer the disappointments of time. No one loves it like the parents; no one has such an interest in its welfare as they. If it is happy, they rejoice with it; if it is in trouble, they nurse it and sorrow over it. They watch its early struggles with eagerness and anxiety; they encourage it in everything that is virtuous and good; they dissuade it from sin and sinful companions; and even when it goes forth into the world to make trial of its powers and capabilities, they follow it with their sympathy and with their prayers to God at a throne of grace. And yet the Psalmist feels that this prop may give way. There may be a forsaking and forgetting by parents of the children that are theirs. The affections of the heart may grow cold towards them, or those parents may be prostrated on a bed of sickness or carried away by death. And then in such an extremity the orphan children very properly turn to that God who feeds the ravens when they cry, and exclaim, "When my

father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

The complaint or trouble, then, here brought before us is that of being forsaken, being left desolate. It is anticipated suffering, but suffering not arising from persecution, to which many Christians were exposed in the early ages of the Church; nor yet from bodily pain or a guilty conscience, but from a voluntary or involuntary forsaking by those on whom we lean and in whom we trust. No one likes to be forsaken. And this forsaking may arise from various causes —from a want of affection, or from dislike, or from other and stronger objects taking possession of the heart. Or it may arise from helplessness, or ignorance, or incapacity on the part of those on whom we trust. And this desolate or forlorn condition may be experienced not merely by children, but by men and women in all circumstances of life. Ishmael was for a time forsaken by his mother in the wilderness. Moses was forsaken by his parents when, a helpless

and weeping babe, he was committed to the waters of the Nile. David had his many days of solitary exile, away from God's house and God's ordinances. Paul, too, was forsaken by Demas and the Roman converts. And even our blessed Lord Himself—He who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, He who tasted of all and more than all the trials of life—was not only deserted by men, but on the cross He cried out, "My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?"

Now, as this is a common experience of life, —an experience of life which many feel, and which no doubt often causes bitter anguish and pain,—it is not merely necessary that we should all be upon our guard against putting too much confidence in earthly helps, but that we should know where alone our true refuge and our strength lie. And here the Bible comes to our aid, with its warnings and its promises and hopes. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," says God. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart

from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." "Trust in the Lord at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him." So David trusted in God and leaned on Him in many a time of trial,—when he was in the wilderness fleeing from Saul, hunted like a partridge upon the mountains—when he was alone in conflict with the giant Goliath. So, too, did the persecuted and afflicted apostle. "All men forsook me," he says on one occasion. "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." And so, too, has many a solitary and bereaved one when away, for instance, in a foreign land, or when on the pathless sea, or when in the dark chambers of the house of death,—in these desolate times the confident heart has risen to God and found a helper in God, giving emphasis and truthfulness to the Psalmist's words, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

And hence the value of religious instruction to the young, of parents teaching their

children about God, and about the love and faithfulness of God, in the days of their infancy and youth. When there is such uncertainty about their own and their children's future—when there is a possibility, in the providence of God, of father and mother forsaking them—how necessary is it that in the dawning of their days, in the opening of their young minds to religious knowledge and impressions and religious practice, they should be told of a Father in heaven, and of the care and concern even of God Almighty for the young and inexperienced of our race. "Suffer the little children to come unto me," says the blessed Jesus still, "and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it;"—while in the ordinances of the Church there stands the sacrament of baptism, specially provided for the children of Christian parents. God thus invites the youthful heart to come to Him. He solicits the love and affection and devotion even of

those "babes and sucklings" out of whose mouths "He perfects praise." And thus God leads them to trust in Him, so that when earthly helps give way, and father and mother forsake them, He may take them up, and guide and protect them among the many trials and temptations of life.

And not only so, but how necessary is it for all in this changing and evanescent scene to acquaint themselves with God—to trust in Him, and love and revere Him, even so that they may all the more confidently resort to Him in their time of trouble and need! God expects the confidence and recognition of His intelligent creatures. He has shown His interest in us not merely by our creation and preservation, not merely by the creation of this world as our temporary home, but He has shown His *infinite* love to us by giving up His Son to the death on our account. God therefore expects us to trust in Him, and love Him, and hold fellowship with Him. And when we think of the Bible with all its lessons of God, and the Sabbath with all its

opportunities of serving God, and the sanctuary with its godly and holy exercises, surely it becomes us to think often and fondly of the Almighty,—to think of Him not as an angry God, but as a loving Father—to think of Him as a sure refuge and stay in a world of change and sorrow,—so that when the dark days do come to us and the pleasures of the world avail us not, even when father and mother forsake us and lover and friend are put far from us, then as Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, so may we turn ourselves implicitly to God, assured that He will take us up and give us at last an abundant entrance into His heavenly kingdom.

SERMON VIII.

On the Vesture of the Saints in Heaven.

REV. VI. 11.

"And white robes were given unto every one of them."

THIS is the consolatory answer of the Almighty to the loud cry that proceeded from the souls under the altar in this vision of the Apostle John. The spirits of the martyred saints—those who had been "slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held"—are here represented in this passage of Holy Writ as longing for justice, if not vengeance, on the heads of their cruel murderers; and the answer which they receive from their heav-

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enly Father is the gift of white robes—robes whiter than the snow, and brighter than the morning light. Burning with love to their Saviour, and zeal for His holy cause, these redeemed ones were longing for the justice of heaven to be visited upon those who were the enemies and persecutors of the saints upon the earth. And while the tender voice of the Divine Being is heard encouraging them to patience—"that they should rest yet for a little season"—soothing them as a mother soothes her infant to sleep; and whilst that same voice informs them of what apparently they did not know, that others of their brethren on earth were yet to suffer as they had done, and to die as they had died,—God in the meantime gives them a gift, a beautiful gift, and one, we believe, far more satisfying and more productive of happiness to them than if a thunderbolt had been hurled from Jehovah's throne upon the cruel enemies and persecutors of the Church.

And so we find the Divine Being in the

upper sanctuary displaying those tender, long-suffering, and loving features of character which appear so radiant and conspicuous in the pages of inspiration. God is a God of consolation, of long-suffering, of wisdom and love. He soothes the impatient souls of these martyred saints by gracious words, by gentle encouragements, and by gifts which only a holy and Almighty God could give. He displays His long-suffering mercy by sparing the impenitent and open enemies of His cause, instead of making the earth red with their blood. And he shows His wisdom and love by taking His own time to carry out His great purposes and plans, both as regards angels and men, in the universe which He has made, and which He ever governs and upholds. So is it in the experience of all of us. We ask of God one thing, and we find He often gives us another. We wrestle with and entreat our heavenly Father for some temporal blessing, and, after many prayers and tears it may be, we obtain some spiritual grace.

So was it with the Apostle Paul. He asked deliverance—thrice asked deliverance—from the "thorn in the flesh," and instead thereof there came the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." So was it also with our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane. He asked—thrice asked, too—that the "cup" might be allowed to "pass," and instead thereof "there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening Him." But whatever may be the nature of the blessing we obtain from God, it is full of mercy, full of grace, full of consolation and love. And as it is on earth among suppliants at the footstool, so apparently is it in heaven. The souls under the altar, as if wearied waiting for retribution, cry for justice, and they are answered by that God with whom one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day—with "white robes," the shining garments of immortality.

And yet, although there is an apparent dissimilarity between the thing asked for

and the thing given, *may we not, after all, discern in this gift a harmony between the cry and the answer that is made to that cry?* These true and faithful servants of the Lord had lost their lives in consequence of their connection with and fidelity to Him. Their lives were taken from the earth. They were slain, it may be, with the sword, or with some other among the many instruments of torture and destruction that were sought out or invented in the days of the apostles, and even in after ages, for putting Christians to death. And sad, too, often were the circumstances under which these cruelties were perpetrated. The relentless murderers of the saints of God in persecuting times did not consider the suffering they were causing, the homes they were making empty, the loving hearts that were being broken by bereavement, and the anguish and distress that were being produced in what had hitherto been happy and peaceful scenes. All that they thought of was how they might rid the world of Christ's followers, and extinguish

and obliterate His cause in the earth. But it was all in vain. There was One mightier than they were sitting in the heavens, and by the overruling providence of that God who makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and who restrains the remainder of His wrath, the result of their cruelty and rage and hate was only the extension of His cause in this world, and the taking away of God's chosen ones from the conflict to the crown—from the sorrows and trials of time to immortal life and immortal honours in heaven. And so these "white robes" were given them as *emblems of immortality*. These martyred ones had lost their lives for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and now Jesus gives them immortal life in heaven. The frail bodies that had clothed their spirits here in this world—the tabernacles of clay—were now mouldering in the grave or reduced to their kindred dust; and Jesus clothes them with garments that are as immortal as their own spiritual nature, and as enduring as the throne of God. They had

sacrificed lives that at longest were but short, checkered, and uncertain here—lives that were exposed to temptation and trial; and now immortal life was their portion, and they were set down under the altar in heaven's safest and holiest place, where, like our first parents in innocence, they were permitted to speak to and dwell with God, and that, too, in a world where death and the ravages of the great destroyer should never reach them more.

And so all this is in perfect harmony with Scripture teaching. Our losses here are as nothing compared to our gains in heaven. "There is no man," says Jesus, "that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark x. 29, 30). "For I reckon," says the Apostle Paul, "that the sufferings of this present time are not

worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans viii. 18). And therefore, as God's people, all we lose or suffer in this world is to be more than compensated for in the world to come. Is it friends we lose here?—we are to meet them there. Is it riches?—we are to receive the true riches. Is it a cross that is to be our lot now?—it is a crown hereafter. Do we surrender earthly honour for Christ?—our names are to be written in the Book of Life, and our good deeds inscribed upon the pillars of the heavenly Jerusalem. And in this way does the Almighty, by holy words and spiritual consolations, cheer us under trial, at the same time that He is pouring down upon us from on high the richest treasures of His grace.

But these white robes of the souls under the altar, as seen by the Apostle John in this vision, are also symbolical of *purity*. For whiteness of garment is ever represented to us as the vesture of heaven; not, perhaps, the cold, frigid, snowy whiteness

of earth, but the glowing shining brightness, warmth, and radiancy of the upper sanctuary. Whatever, therefore, may be the varieties of dress that men and women assume here upon earth, white garments are ever spoken of in connection with the heavenly world, just as there is mention made of "the white stone and the new name in it," and also of the great white throne and of Him who sits upon it. When Jesus was transfigured upon Mount Tabor, "His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them." The "countenance" of the angel, too, at the Saviour's sepulchre "was like lightning, and His raiment white as snow" (Matt. xxviii. 3). The angel who came to Cornelius the centurion, at Cesarea, was arrayed "in bright clothing." And so now of these martyred ones: white robes are given to every one of them, to indicate the holiness and perfect purity of their nature. Just as the babe on its baptismal day is arrayed in white to

indicate the holy life it is henceforth expected to live; and just as the virgin on her bridal morn often decks herself out in garments of the purest white, to indicate to all around the spotless purity of her person; or as the priestly ones in the temple of old, when they fulfilled their office, were clad in white, — so the denizens of the heavenly world, the saints of God in the upper sanctuary, are all clad in these shining garments, in order that they may be the fit dwellers in a holy heaven, and the everlasting companions of a holy God.

Nor let it be supposed for a moment that these "white robes" are only for the martyred ones in heaven, the slaughtered saints of God. On the contrary, they are for all who belong to Jesus, and who, having been His servants and witnesses here upon the earth, are to be owned and acknowledged by Him, and welcomed into His heavenly kingdom. When this same Apostle John saw in another vision a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and

kindred, and people, and tongue, stand before the throne, and before the Lamb, they too were clothed with white robes, and had palms in their hands. These robes had been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. And so we are taught throughout all the pages of Revelation, that pardon of sin, and purity of nature, and fitness for heaven, and a title to heaven, are to be secured, and only to be secured, in and through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ,—of Him who declared on the night preceding His crucifixion that in His Father's house, to which He was going to prepare a place for His people, there were many mansions, and that He was the *way* to heaven, as well as the *truth* and the *life*.

And finally, let it be observed that these "white robes" were *given* to "the souls under the altar." They were not *made* by them, nor *purchased* by them, nor, as far as they themselves were concerned, *deserved* by them; but they were given to them by that God, who "so loved the world, that He

gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And this indicates to us the sovereignty of the Divine Being in the matter of our salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God." But, oh! how loving, how merciful, how gracious, how compassionate is that God! "Whosoever will," says the Divine Being as He closes the Book of Inspiration—as He speaks as it were His last word to sinful and dying men, to our fallen and suffering race—"whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." And therefore let us one and all endeavour to respond to the divine invitation, so that, identifying ourselves with Christ and His cause and kingdom here upon earth, we may at last be clothed with white robes—the robes of the Redeemer's righteousness—and then, in that great and solemn day of the Lord, there will be seen in us neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing.

SERMON IX.

Longing for Home.

HEBREWS xi. 16.

"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."

ONE of the most strongly-marked characteristics of the human mind is that of *desire*—the longing to possess and to enjoy objects that are external to the mind itself. Although the soul's happiness depends very much upon itself—its own properly regulated emotions, feelings, and desires—yet out of it in endless and diversified profusion there exist objects to which it attaches itself, and to which its hidden propensities incline. A soul might exist in an empty untenanted

world—a universe of desert where there were no beings, no fields, flowers, or oceans on which it might descant—but it could not be happy or comfortable there. It might live on its own thoughts, feed on the ceaseless flow of its own ideas, but its desires after outer and external good would require to be quenched within it before its happiness could be complete. And hence it is that man's *dependence* is proclaimed in every desire he cherishes, in every wish and longing that the soul expresses, and in all those ceaseless cravings that are ever welling up in, and streaming forth from, the human bosom. Man might live, but he could not be happy alone. A tenantless world would be a miserable world to him. And hence, moreover, the *beneficence* and *love* of the Divine Being in peopling man's universe not only with creatures of varied aspect and development, but in robing it also in a vesture of rich and ever-changing hue. The all but unconscious babe, when entering upon life, opens its eyes not only upon the loveliness of a mother's

face, but upon the grandeur and magnificence of a world bounded only by the stars of heaven. And as sense and reason develop themselves, as the faculties grow and expand, it beholds the activities of life, the motions of days and years, the onward progress of events, the constant recurrence of seasons, the eager hurry of anxious and toiling multitudes; and forthwith from its bosom there springs that feeling of *desire* — one of the earliest manifestations of an existence which shall assuredly change, but which shall never have an end.

And this desire after things external to the mind is both a universal and a permanent feeling. It exists in all men, and in every stage of life. Nor can it be eradicated from the soul as a limb or member can be lopped off the body. Education and training may teach us to control and modify it; but as it is found in the infant that is slumbering in its cradle, so it exists also in him who in old age and infirmity is going down to the chambers of the grave. The

soul speaks out from within us, not only in lofty imaginings and contemplations, but also in earnest cravings and desires after foreign and external good. It utters its varied and mysterious whisperings, not only in hopes and fears, in joys and sorrows, in reminiscences of the past and conjectures as to the future, but also in longings and wishings for higher and better blessing. It is not content to dwell in this vast world and look out on all its grandeur as a mere unconcerned or uninterested spectator,—it claims to be a possessor and owner of much of what it sees. Even the veriest sloth who drags out an indolent existence, and who almost sleeps away a life that has been given him for the noblest of ends—even he is not content to admire merely or to adore the wisdom which has devised and fashioned all this loveliness and beauty; for out from within him at times there comes the earnest craving to possess and enjoy. That seemingly insignificant spirit which man's frail body can confine has longings and

pantings which nothing on earth can satisfy. There are depths there which whole oceans of created good cannot fill. There is a height and length and breadth of requirement which nothing but God and eternity can meet; and as man passes from one stage of existence on to another, — as he emerges from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age,—as his opinions fluctuate and his views change,—as his body itself undergoes changes with advancing years,—there ever accompanies him this feeling of desire, this sense of want, this consciousness of dependence upon a world and creatures that are external to himself.

Now, we have the existence and strength of this feeling alluded to in the passage before us, where the inspired apostle, referring to some of the patriarchs of old, the sainted ancestors of the Jewish race, tells us, in one brief sentence, that there came a time in their history when their *patriotism* connected itself not with time, but with eter-

nity—not with this world, but with the next; for they desired a better country, that is, an heavenly. The bodies of these ancient saints have long since gone to their graves, and their spirits have entered upon scenes which the Almighty has concealed from our view. But when on earth, the inspired writer tells us that these individuals, in the midst of life's duties and engagements, cherished this feeling as a predominating and ruling passion in their breasts. And from the terms of the expression that is here used, it would appear that although their desires always remained with them, the objects of these desires changed. Formerly, perhaps, when they were only in the dawning of spiritual life—in the infancy of piety, or when their faith was weak, and their experience of life's "broken cisterns" was not so mature as it afterwards became—they desired other things. But *now*, says the inspired writer, they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly. And it is evident, from the manner in which this is

alluded to here, that it was thought highly commendable in them to cherish and express such a desire. They are lauded for it, and praised for it, by the servant of that very God in whose world they were living, and with whose sources of happiness they were indirectly expressing dissatisfaction. Possessing great riches—occupying commanding stations in the world—lifted up by God to heights of great honour—surrounded with a sanctity and glory compared with which the loftiest worldly distinction is as a mere fleeting vapour,—these eminent individuals gave vent to feelings which showed that they were not happy nor satisfied with it all. They lived, too, in a country honoured above all other lands — a country selected for them by God, and well calculated to engage their affection, evoke their patriotism, and excite their devotions. And yet they desired a better country—that is, an heavenly. They "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." They were like the exile in a foreign land, away from the

friends and home and associations of his youth; or like the bird of strange note and plumage that some rude hand had carried away from its sunny home; or like the mountain-pine that had braved the storms of winter, and proudly borne its snows, now cast down into some hidden abyss,—these ancient saints fretted almost and sighed, or at least longed for that better country where their fully ripened faith should develop itself into sight, and where their most ardent anticipations should be fully realised.

I. Now, as this is a feeling which, as Christians, we should all more or less cherish, let me say that there is no inconsistency between cherishing such a desire, and at the same time fully recognising the importance of the *duties* and *obligations* that attach to this present life.

In order to have a proper frame of mind in regard to a happy eternity, it is not necessary for us to be living in a hateful, morbid, discontented state in regard to the

businesses, duties, and concerns of time. On the very contrary, the calm, acquiescent, chastened, contented spirit of the believer is one of the best guarantees of his ripeness and readiness for his heavenly home. Not only so, but we have many express and authoritative commands given us by God in regard to the importance and momentousness of the issues that have to be determined here. This life is not merely the antecedent, but it is the causal of the happiness or misery of the next. And no better proof can be given of the importance which God attaches to life here, than by reflecting on the strong desire to live which He has implanted in every human breast, by the profusion and abundance that exist around us, and by the noble work which He has given each of us to do. Indeed, in every creature to which God has given life He has given the strongest desire to preserve that life. Look, for instance, at the flight of animals in the chase, how they use their utmost and God-given speed to escape from

their bloodthirsty pursuers; or look at the fishes of the sea, how they hurry away from their more powerful neighbours; or look at man himself when his life is menaced with destruction, what efforts he makes to preserve it! When a fire, for instance, occurs at midnight in his dwelling, and he is aroused from his slumbers by the smoke and the noise of the blazing, crackling, and raging flames, his first thought and effort is about his life, and when that is saved everything else is allowed to perish. And the same feeling is experienced when a shipwreck occurs at sea, and when all on board the vessel expect a watery grave. The first rush is for life, and when that is secured everything else becomes only a matter of secondary concern,—all showing the value which attaches to life here, and what struggles are made to preserve it. And the same thing is taught us by the profusion, the ample profusion and abundance, that exists around us. For it is no mean or despicable world that God has fitted up as our tem-

porary home, but one that is in many respects desirable and attractive. Nor is it a mean work which God has given us to do, but one well calculated to excite the enthusiasm and stir the hearts of the noblest of our race.

And yet all this high appreciation of the value and importance and desirableness of life here is perfectly consistent with the desire for another and a better life—even the life of the redeemed in heaven. For the existence of the one feeling does not necessarily destroy that of the other. Simultaneously in the breast of him who fully appreciates the blessings and privileges of existence here, there may be the longing for another and a better world. The ocean, it is said, has its under-currents of which the waters at the surface know nothing. The tree whose branches and leaves, and blossom and fruit, are laying contributions on the sun's heat and the surrounding atmosphere, is at the same time extracting nourishment from the earth at its roots. From that bed of sickness on which the sufferer lies, there

may be gushing forth streams of affection and love to all around, and yet at the same time there may be the deepest devotion to God. And so in the breast of him who is most busy in life,—in all life's noble enterprises and holy aims—in all its scenes of wretchedness and homes of distress,—there may be the highest appreciation of the work given him to do, and yet there may often be the secret longing for another and a better world. So was it with the Apostle Paul. He was "in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philip. i. 23). This world may be rich in objects of beauty and grandeur, but stained as it is by sin and associated with misery, it is nothing to be compared to the New Jerusalem above, whose streets are gold, whose gates are pearl, whose atmosphere is love, and whose walls are ever echoing with angel-songs. Here there may be much to engage the attention and captivate the heart, but it is nothing to be compared to that infinity of grandeur

and happiness that emanate from Jehovah's throne. And as the believer reflects on the higher and nobler and purer and more enduring scene above, where there is no night, and no death, and no separation, and no sorrow nor pain,—as he thinks of the white-robed and loving spirits that come and go there—like his Divine Master, who had a baptism to be baptised with, and who was straitened till it was accomplished,—so the true child of God, ever cherishing the desire for a better world, hurries on and increases his work here, because he knows that the reward hereafter will be all the greater, and the cup of happiness all the more full.

II. But, moreover, it is right and proper to cherish this desire, because of the universally felt and acknowledged *insufficiency* of this present scene.

It may seem something like presumption for frail man to speak of the insufficiency of the present world—a world which God made, and at first pronounced to be very good,—a

world so vast, so great, so unbounded, so hidden in many of its processes, and so beneficent in its ends. And yet experience and God's Word tell us that such is actually the case. How many are there, for instance, that have tried the world—staked their all on it — both of those who are now living and those who are dead, and have found it only to be husks and wretchedness, like the provision of that "far country" on which the prodigal of old fed and starved! There is nothing, indeed, that so much deceives us as the power and capacity of the world to satisfy our desires. It seems so suited to our nature—its objects are so attractive and lovely, its promises are so fair — that the thoughtless and inexperienced often ruin themselves by trusting to its power. There is *Fame*, for instance, lifting up its blazing banner on yon steep, lofty, rugged, almost inaccessible height, and attracting the gaze of eager, ambitious, and panting multitudes. And here, in another place, is *Wealth*, holding out her golden symbol, and fascinat-

ing myriads by its lustre. And there, in another place, is *Power*, wielding her mighty sceptre over subject-nations. And yonder is *Pleasure*, with charms streaming from every glance, and ever captivating the heart, but eluding the grasp, and disappointing the hopes of ingenuous youth. These, and such as these, are some of the rewards which the world has to offer to its votaries.

And then think of the imperfection of language and knowledge — of the darkness that surrounds almost every subject on which the mind employs itself. How are we separated, not merely by physical barriers, but by speech itself, from multitudes of our race who are traversing the same earth with ourselves! We attempt to know many things, but cannot. We endeavour to discover truth, but language itself—the very instrument intended by God to show us it—often conceals it from our view. Our ideas of things are ever in advance of the reality. Which of you all ever saw scenes upon earth

such as your young and ardent imaginations conjured up in the mind? Which of you all ever experienced pleasure that came up to the craving in the immortal soul? The truth is, as we live on in the world, and behold its processes and taste of its delights, we are made to feel that it is only an imperfect and temporary scene,—that it only provides nourishment suited in some measure for our vagrant, wandering, pilgrim condition, but that it does not furnish the happiness we sigh for here and anticipate in our final heavenly home. There is no visible God here; there is no exemption from pain and suffering here; there are no satisfying pleasures here: and as the soul looks out from the frail body upon the world which God has made, and tastes of its unsatisfying provision, it has again and again to give utterance to the declaration, *I am but a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth.*

And hence the propriety—shall I not say the necessity?—of our *desiring a better country, that is, an heavenly.* For if we

foolishly imagine that there may be things here that can satisfy us, and neglect the intimations and invitations of an ascended Saviour, we will assuredly be deceived. You may go from one object to another, thinking that you will find rest and peace there that you did not find in something else; but you will only be going from one *broken cistern* to another—leaning upon this arm of flesh and that one, instead of taking your stand upon the Rock of Ages, and trusting in and clinging to, and grasping an eternal, all-satisfying, and unchanging God. Your home is above; your destiny and happiness and rest are there; and therefore, just as the joyous bride longs for the home which is henceforth to be hers, and as the heavy-laden and sin-burdened soul seeks for rest in Christ, and as the wearied labourer at the close of day longs for the repose of night, —so let us, as the followers of an ascended Saviour, often try to desire that better country which is to be our everlasting and happy abode.

III. And surely, if anything could compel us — could stir us up to this desire — to heavenliness of mind and aim, it is *the thought—the certain thought—that we must part with all we have here at the hour of death.* The inspired Psalmist in one portion of the Sacred Book plaintively mourns the brevity of human life when he says, "Behold, Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth, and mine age is as nothing before Thee" (Ps. xxxix. 5). And further on in the same book it is truly declared that when man "dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him" (Ps. xlix. 17). So that when that solemn hour comes, willing or unwilling, we must bid farewell to all created things. Our tenure of this life, and of the things of this life, is only temporary, and like the great and good of bygone ages—the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles of the Church, and the statesmen, warriors, philosophers, and poets of the world, like all the generations of the past—we must enter that eternity from whose

boundaries none are ever permitted to return. Surely, then, prudence, interest, duty, loyalty to God and obedience to Christ, —all should prompt us to follow in the footsteps of our Divine Master, our departed Lord—and think often of, and even at times long for, the blessed home that awaits us, and the friends and society that we shall meet with there.

IV. And then to crown all, *we should consider the intention and desire of our ascended Saviour.* For it is His wish and prayer—a prayer uttered on that memorable night which preceded His crucifixion, and which is inscribed upon the pages of this blessed Book—that His people should not remain always in this world, that they should not be away from Him, but that they should be with Him where He is to behold His glory (John xvii. 24). And when we consider that it is one of the functions of His ministry in heaven to prepare "*a place*" for His people—to garnish all

their homes and adorn their everlasting resting-places — when we reflect that the blessed Jesus is eagerly waiting for our advent into the heavenly world,—surely this should animate all our hearts and quicken our desires after the celestial scenes. Oh, what a glorious consummation is that referred to by our blessed Lord of the saved ones coming "from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south"—from every corner of the revolving world—and sitting down at last in the kingdom of God! For every wall of the holy city has gates in it to facilitate the entrance of God's people into their heavenly Father's house; so that what was seen by John in apocalyptic vision will yet be actually realised—of "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."

May we and all connected with us be-

long to this blessed number; and may our Sabbaths and sacraments and other seasons of grace, through the working of the Holy Spirit, as well as the discipline of our earthly lives, fit and prepare us for that world above which Christ is preparing for those who love Him, so that it may be ours at last.

SERMON X.

On the Rewards of Faithful Ministers in another World.[1]

DANIEL XII. 3.

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

IT is impossible to over-estimate the importance of reward as a motive to virtue and virtuous conduct. Although savouring apparently of the selfish and mercenary in its character, yet there is nothing that is

[1] This sermon was preached in the parish church of Cramond on Sunday the 2d December 1877, some days after the Rev. Dr Colvin's death. The personal references are omitted; but it may be permitted here to state that Dr Colvin was a faithful and exemplary minister, and one deeply attached to the Church of Scotland,—so much so, that although his relative Dr Welsh, the biographer of Dr

so well calculated to rouse the soul from lethargy, and impel and sustain it in the performance of good and holy deeds, as that of recompense here or hereafter. Devotion, patriotism, fear, love, a profound sense of duty, or some lurking and secret impulse of the soul, may at times powerfully affect our conduct, and move us to do things that we would not otherwise have done, even in the face of danger and death; but, nevertheless, foremost among all the potent influences of our nature is that of reward—the glowing expectation of recognition and acknowledgment when the toil is over and the work is done. Nor is there anything dishonourable or improper in such a feeling as this on the part of beings constituted as we are, having a moral nature and such tremendous responsibilities to God and man. On the contrary, it would be morally criminal

Thomas Brown, was, as Moderator, the first to leave St Andrew's Church, Edinburgh, in the movement to Canonmills on that eventful day in May 1843, Dr Colvin did not follow him, but remained in the Church of his fathers. Dr Welsh was also Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Edinburgh.

and sinful on our part were we deliberately to ignore the conditions of our existence upon earth, and set at nought all those high moral and spiritual forces with which the Almighty has invested us. With such capacities for sympathy and action, such opportunities of doing good in a world where there is so much sin, suffering, ignorance, and want —with so many prizes held out to us both in time and eternity,—it would betray an insensibility and callousness on our part utterly inexcusable were we not to avail ourselves of all and every motive which the Divine Being has placed within our reach. And not only so, but as reason, experience, and Scripture teach us, reward is an important principle of the divine government, serving important ends, and leading to important results; and it shows us the righteousness of that government, that God wishes us not only to be good, but to do good, when thus there are so many rewards attached to virtue, and so many bans set upon vice.

And, moreover, this element of reward

pervades to a greater or less extent the whole framework of human society, and meets us wherever we go. In school and senate, in field and workshop, in the halls of merchandise and in the marts of commerce, in hospitals and sick-rooms, we see youth and age making exertion, rendering service, either to themselves or their fellow-men, and anticipating reward either in the substantial prizes of wealth, learning, honour, power, or the more secret but no less important and satisfactory ones of an approving conscience or the smile of heaven. In all this busy theatre of existence there is no holy useful service that we render that is *in vain.*

I. Now this principle which performs such an important part in the divine government is just as conspicuous and important in that particular branch of it which is known as religion, or the Church of God. Here, too, there is reward to stimulate the lagging, to encourage the feeble, to comfort the sorrowing and bereaved, and to strengthen the

Christian warrior in his contests for an immortal crown. For although salvation be of grace, although by the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified, although, according to Christian ethics, it is only the righteousness of Christ that renders any action meritorious in the sight of God, nevertheless God holds out to us the promise of rewards as if we actually deserved them; and not only so, but seems to proportionate the reward to the degree of holiness we have attained, or the amount of service we have rendered to His cause upon the earth. It may be that as sinners saved by grace we can lay no claim to the prizes of heaven on the ground of merit; but although we cannot do it on the ground of merit in ourselves, we can do so on the ground of merit in Christ and His work. And not only so, but we can make this claim on the ground of promise—promise in every form written down in the pages of that Book which tells us of redeeming love and of the joys and happiness of heaven. For there are here

promises to the meek, the diligent, the sorrowing, the faithful, the holy. "The meek shall inherit the earth." "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed." God is "not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." "Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." "Love your enemies," says Jesus, "and do good, and lend, hoping to receive nothing again; and your reward shall be great in heaven, and ye shall be called the children of the Highest." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." These and suchlike are the promises of Revelation in regard to reward. And to encourage us to trust in them and look for the reward, and distrust the false and deceitful promises of the world, not only have we the example of eminent saints in bygone days, but we have the example of Christ Himself in His great work of saving

souls ; for He too, like Moses, "had respect unto the recompense of the reward." "He shall see of the travail of His soul," says the prophet, "and shall be satisfied." "For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Because of His humiliation unto death "God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name : that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." So that the Christian life on earth is in every way encouraged by the hope of reward ; and as Jacob, by rendering a double service, obtained at last his beloved Rachel, so the more we serve Christ here the higher and better shall be our rewards hereafter.

And so the promise of the text is in exact conformity with such teaching. The prophet Daniel seeks to cheer the captive prophets of Babylon and the suffering servants of God in every age, by the promise of a great reward in

heaven. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." For, that the promise does refer to the prophets of God in the old law and the ministers of the Gospel under the Christian dispensation, is evident from the fact that the word rendered "wise" in our version is understood to signify teachers; and this is made still more apparent by the closing words of the text, that such persons "turn many to righteousness." It is evident, then, that it is the teachers of religion chiefly to whom the prophet here refers—those whose office and business it is not to seduce men to evil or encourage them in worldliness, but rather to turn them from sin to holiness, from vice to virtue, from irreligion and carelessness to piety and God. And that there is a transcendency of glory awaiting such persons in heaven, is evident from the language here employed. Nothing could exceed the magnificence of the imagery used by the prophet—"the brightness of the

firmament," "the stars for ever and ever"! —not merely stars, for in the great day of the Lord the stars will fall from heaven like forest leaves in autumn, but stars for ever and ever. It is a perpetuity of fame, of glory, that the language points to. There was nothing in all this great empire of Babylon, with its riches and magnificence, and its spoils of vanquished nations, to which the prophet could compare the glory of God's servants in another world, and so he betook himself to "the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, which He had ordained." And does not this loftiness of imagery suggest to us loftiness of glory—that everything that is peaceful and beautiful and good will dwell in and radiate from the persons of faithful ministers in heaven? And that there will be different degrees of glory in heaven is not only evident from the fact that there are different degrees of holiness upon earth, but from the express letter of the divine Word. According to the teaching of one apostle, there are some

"righteous" that are "scarcely saved." They get into heaven and nothing more. Then, again, another tells us that there are others that are "saved as if by fire." Others, again, have "an abundant entrance administered to them" into the heavenly kingdom. Then, again, we read of "a righteous man's reward," of "a prophet's reward," as if rewards were different in the other world. "Whatsoever a man soweth," says the Word of God, "that shall he also reap." Those who "sow sparingly" are to "reap sparingly"; those who "sow bountifully" are to "reap bountifully." Some faithful servants are to be "set over five cities," others are to be "set over ten cities." The variety that pervades all God's beautiful creation is to pervade the glory of the denizens of heaven. Just as there are different members of the human body, and some more honourable than others, and different offices in the Church of Christ, and some more honourable than others, so will it be in the rewards of eternity. "All flesh

is not the same flesh." "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial." "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead." And so also is the character of the redeemed in heaven. Those who have taught in Christ's name, who have prophesied in Christ's name, who have ministered in Christ's name; those who have proclaimed His truth and defended it, and, it may be, suffered for it; those who have turned many to righteousness, — for them there will be a peculiar glory in the heavenly mansions, a peculiar honour in their heavenly Father's house, for "they shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever." "Ye are they," said Christ to the apostles, "which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and

sit on *thrones* judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke xxii. 28-30).

II. Nor is it difficult to perceive why there should be a great reward awaiting the faithful ministers of Christ in another world. It is because of the greatness, dignity, and importance of the service they render upon earth.

No office or work upon earth is greater or more important than that of a minister of the Gospel. He is a fellow-worker with God and with all good beings in the regeneration and salvation of mankind. Not only has he to deal with the most momentous of all themes, the most supreme of all interests, but his conduct and teaching influence for time and eternity the souls of those committed to his care. There is something peculiarly expressive and suggestive in the phraseology of the apostle in regard to this office—"a servant of Jesus Christ," "ambassadors for Christ." A servant and ambassador of Him who was pure and stainless as

the throne of God; of Him who was a servant Himself—a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; of Him whose love burned like a quenchless flame for the fallen and lost, and who ultimately laid down His life for them upon the cross. The servant of Christ, therefore, occupies a sacred, responsible, unique position in the world. He is the bearer of a divine commission originally given by Christ Himself—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature;" and he therefore fulfils a divine, a spiritual law. He does not stand in his pulpit to instruct men in politics, philosophy, art, or science, or in any of the many ways of becoming rich or powerful in the world; but he stands there to invite them to come to Christ, to urge the careless among them to become reconciled to God, and to rouse them to a concern for their souls' welfare. As a moral beacon in a world of danger and death, as a great spiritual power set there by God, it is his duty to warn men of the evil, folly, and consequences of sin—to show

them wherein their true happiness lies; and, conscious of the many and great wants of humanity, to point them to the satisfying riches that is in Christ, and to the happy and eternal regions above.

III. And the difficulties, discouragements, and trials of this office are great. They are not only inherent in the preacher himself in his manifold infirmities and weaknesses, but they arise also from the condition of the outer world of mankind. There is a natural aversion in the hearts of the unregenerate to piety and holiness of life. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." God often hides even yet, it would appear, as in the days of old, the truths of salvation from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes. Hunger and thirst will compel men to eat and drink; the severity of climate and the colds of winter will compel them to robe

themselves in warm clothing; but it requires the prayers, the entreaties, the persistent and repeated exhortations, and even the tears of ministers of the Gospel, to get some men to think about their souls, and to prepare for that great day when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God. Such is the office and functions of the minister of the Gospel; and these functions are often performed amid much bodily weakness, ingratitude, unbelief, indifference, apparent failure, and even opposition itself. To enforce purity on others, he must himself be pure; to win men to gentleness and love, he must himself be gentle and kind; to teach men patience and faith and self-denial, he must exhibit those graces in his own character; to kindle and fan the flame of piety all the more effectively in the hearts of others, it must ever be burning in his own heart. And thus on, all through life, in sick-rooms and death-rooms, in scenes of joy and sorrow, in schools and churches, he has to carry on his blessed work as a living ex-

ponent of Christianity among young and old, until at last the messenger of disease, it may be, finds him, and death too enters his chamber, and the frail body—the habitation of the spirit—is laid low, and consigned to the silence and gloom of the grave.

It is no wonder, then, that in that other and better world which Christ is preparing for those who love Him, there should be a great and glorious reward awaiting the emancipated spirit of every faithful servant of Christ. It is no wonder that that spirit should not only be borne in the arms of angels to the very presence of God, but that the best robe should be put on it, and the brightest crown set upon the brow. It would be contrary to all our conceptions of our heavenly Father's character, of Christ's faithfulness and love, of the promises of religion, of the equity and justice of the divine government, were it otherwise. But it is not so. "Where I am," says Christ, "there shall also my servant be." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me

on my throne." If he that gives a cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, is not to go without his reward; if the visiting of the sick and the prisoner, the clothing of the naked, the feeding and nourishing of the hungry and thirsty, are all to be remembered and acknowledged and rewarded in the great day of the Lord,—oh, how great will be the reward of the faithful ministers of Christ—those whose lives have been spent in His service, who have witnessed for Him and testified of Him before men, and who, under God, have been the means of bringing many to the foot of the Saviour's cross! They shall indeed enjoy a glory that excelleth; for "they shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever."

IV. But now the question naturally arises, What is implied in these terms of the prophet as the rewards of faithful servants in heaven, "shining as the brightness of the firmament," "and as the stars for ever and ever"?

This language is figurative, but it undoubtedly points to the glory of Christ's servants in another world. Regarding the nature, employments, and glory of that world we know comparatively little, and for what we do know we are indebted entirely to the Word of God. But there is evidently implied in such expressions ideas of purity, beauty, brightness, and heavenly light. We all know what an important agency light is in the natural world. It is the indispensable condition of much of the happiness we enjoy here upon earth. A dark world would be a miserable world. Indeed darkness is one of the most expressive and terrible characteristics of the place of woe; whilst light is associated with all that is beautiful on earth, and all that we conceive of as lovely in heaven. Our blessed Lord during His ministry upon earth declared that He was "the Light of the world." God is said in Scripture to clothe Himself "with light as with a garment." The good and holy upon earth are said to be the "children of

the light"; and divine truth is itself called *Light.* In heaven "they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them *light:* and they shall reign for ever and ever." And here in this passage, in exact conformity with all these symbols of purity, glory, and happiness, the servants of God, the faithful ministers of Christ, those who are "wise" and those who "turn many to righteousness," when they enter that other world, are to "shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever."

Now all this is just intended to teach us the personal and perpetual glory, beauty, and felicity of Christ's faithful servants in heaven. They were in a sense burning and shining *lights* upon earth, and now, when their work is over and their service is done, God takes them to Himself and fixes them as stars in the celestial firmament. How comforting, then, is all this to the bereaved—to those who are now clothed in garments of woe and sitting in loneliness and sorrow in their

dark and cheerless homes, thinking of and weeping for those who are gone, and weeping all the more as they think of the cold and silent grave! In that grave, to be sure, there is only the precious dust; but that dust is united to Christ, and watched over by Him who has the keys of death and the grave, and it will yet be resuscitated by Him to life—a life of eternal glory, honour, and happiness—and united once more to that spirit that has in the meantime gone to the sinless regions of heaven. "They shall hunger no more," says the Divine Spirit, "neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

V. But, finally, let me say that all this grandeur of reward is *future* — it is not to be enjoyed here. Even the apostles themselves were told by their divine Master

that their reward was to be *great in heaven.* Whatever other rewards, therefore, the faithful servants of God may enjoy or expect here upon earth—such as the favour of God, an approving conscience, the esteem of their fellow-men, the prayers of the righteous, the blessings of the poor, the gratitude of the reformed and penitent—certainly personal or heavenly glory is not one of them; on the contrary, the very reverse of this is and has often been their lot. "Others had trial of cruel mockings," says the writer to the Hebrews, referring to certain Old Testament saints and teachers—"others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." And many, too, in the

Christian ages have had to endure equally great trials, and even death itself, for the sake of the Lord Jesus, like those

> "slaughtered saints, whose bones
> Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold."

And therefore *reward* in Christ's service is not and must not be looked for here. This is the place of toil and conflict, of unwearied labour and faithful service; and it will not be till the body dies and the spirit wings its way to its everlasting home, that that brightness will be assumed that is to rival the firmament and the brilliancy of heaven's stars. May this glory, and the eternal happiness implied in it, be ours hereafter and for ever!

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